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Computer active
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STOP SPAM!
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From the Editor

If I happen to outlive Methuselah's 969 years, I'd still consider life to be too short to spend time finding and removing duplicate files from my PC. Attempting it without specialist software is an exercise in soul-crushing tedium.

So I'm grateful that Robert Irvine has tested the tools that do the job for you. Or, more specifically, he's found programs that delete duplicates without tricking you into paying hidden fees. In fact, his top three in our Cover Feature are all completely free.

Robert also reveals the best strategies for finding duplicates (there's more to it than simply clicking 'Scan'), and explains how to wipe them from phones, tablets and online storage. Along the way you'll learn the Polish for 'hiccup', why programs use checksums to find duplicates, and how you may need to merge rather than remove them.

It's masterful advice, though I suspect he goes too far in describing Google's Files app as "fun to use".

Each to his own, I suppose.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

£7.99
Price of Netflix's Basic plan, which is being axed soon – *p8*

34%
Proportion of adverts on Facebook Marketplace that are scams – *p11*

2880x1800
Resolution in pixels of our new favourite laptop – *p24*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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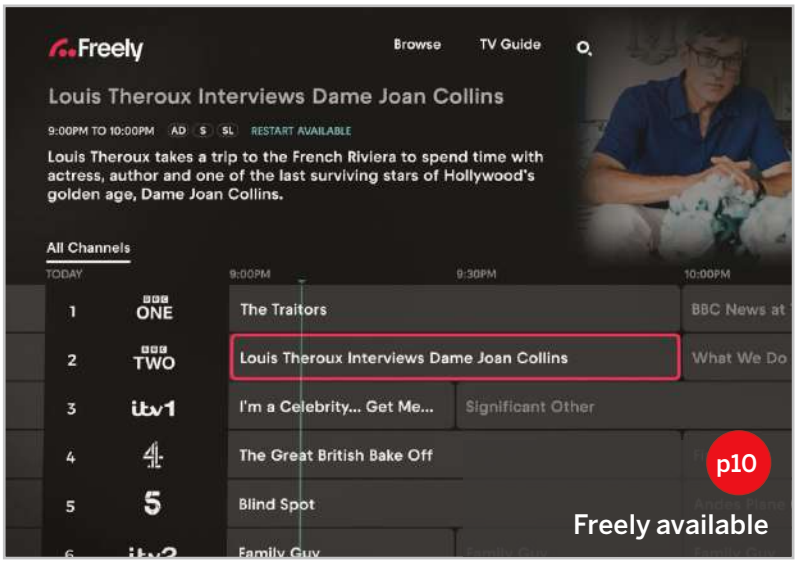

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Freely available

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Subscribe now – and save 30%!
See page 58 for our special subs offer

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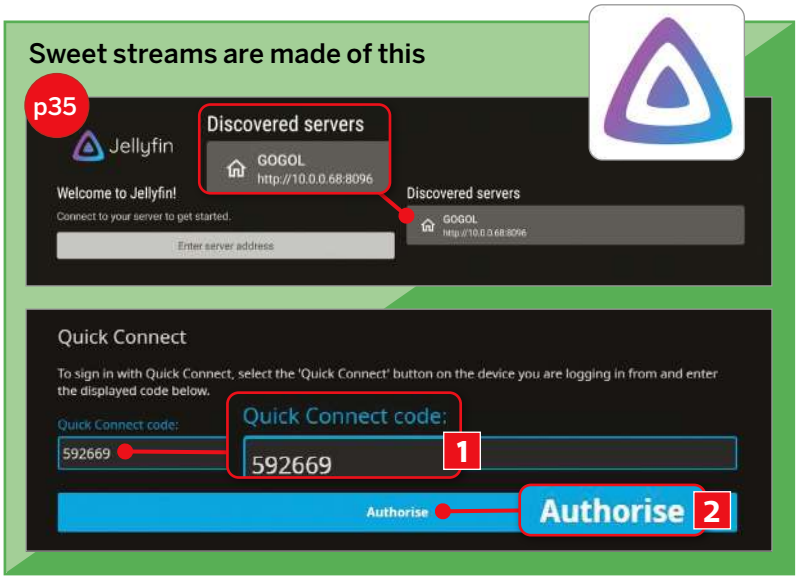
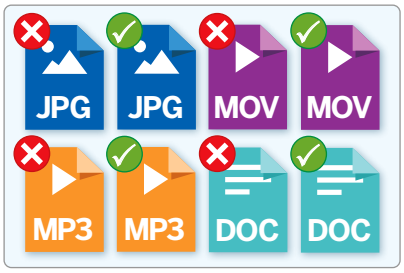


Remove All Your DUPLICATE FILES

COVER FEATURE P50

Find & delete them – FREE, EASY & FAST!



Spammer blow

p60

Faulty updates cause Windows 10 apps to crash

Several faulty updates are causing many Windows 10 apps to crash repeatedly, leading to a flurry of complaints on Microsoft's forums.

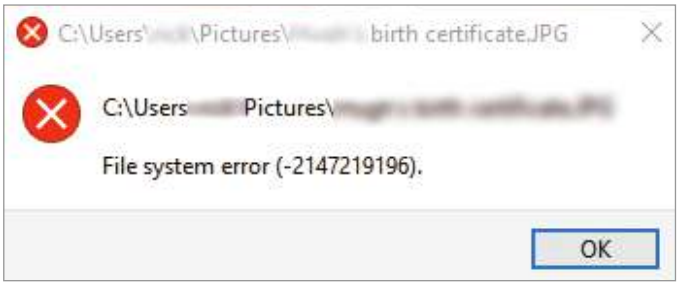
The problems, which are affecting the built-in apps Calendar, Calculator, 'Movies & TV', Paint 3D and Photos (pictured below), seem to have started when Microsoft updated them by releasing new versions via its Store.

This method lets the company update apps quickly and separately without having to wait for a whole new version of Windows to be ready.

However, the latest updates – released in January – have caused an unusually high number of problems, many producing the message 'File System Error (-2147219196)' – see screenshot above right.

Frustrated users tried to report the bugs on Microsoft's Feedback Hub app, but that wasn't working either.

They sought help on Microsoft's Community forum, pointing out that even reinstalling the apps didn't fix things. So many people were having problems that within two weeks the forum thread had stretched to over 60 pages, and been viewed more than 18,000 times.



Microsoft didn't respond to the forum complaints, forcing users to investigate the problems themselves. They concluded the bugs occur only in computers with Intel Core 2 Duo and Intel Core 2 Quad processors.

These were introduced in 2006 and discontinued in 2012. Microsoft doesn't list them as supported processors for Windows 10 (see www.snipca.com/49175), but they have worked fine with the operating system since it launched in 2015.

Some people claimed the errors were proof that Microsoft wanted users to buy new computers. Others dismissed this as a conspiracy theory and instead thought the company had added new instructions for its apps that the old processors couldn't handle.

Because Windows 10 doesn't officially support the processors, they assumed Microsoft hadn't anticipated any problems.

None of the affected users had discovered a fix, and Microsoft hadn't commented by the time we went to press.

WHAT WE THINK

These problems are more likely to be the result of carelessness than conspiracy. It probably didn't even occur to Microsoft to check whether the updates would break computers powered by such old processors. However, the bugs have sparked so much anger on forums that Microsoft will probably release a fix, albeit reluctantly. If you've been affected, treat it as a sign that more tools might stop working as we head towards the end of Windows 10's natural life.

Microsoft Edge usage hits new high

Microsoft's Edge is more popular than ever – hitting an all-time high of 13-per-cent market share in January.

That makes it the world's second most popular browser, ahead of Apple's Safari (9 per cent) and Firefox (7.5 per cent), but far behind Google Chrome's 65 per cent.

Edge was third until December last year when it overtook Safari. Chrome has been top since leapfrogging Internet Explorer in 2012.

The figures are from Statcounter's analysis of browsers running on computers (www.snipca.com/49176). It shows that Edge is the only major browser to show any growth in the past three years.

Microsoft will hope that users are switching to Edge because of new tools like 'Super Drag and Drop', which lets you open links, images and text in new tabs by clicking and dragging with your mouse (see Issue 676, page 42).

Usage of privacy-focused browsers like Brave and Vivaldi – popular with *Computeractive* writers and readers – is too small for Statcounter to measure.

Have you switched to Edge? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

You'll like this...
Germany's railway boards still rely on Windows 3.1 (www.snipca.com/49178)

but not this...
AI will make it easier for scammers to trick victims (www.snipca.com/49177)

Broadband prices rise by 7.9% from April

BT, EE, Plusnet, Three and Vodafone broadband customers will be hit with price increases of 7.9 per cent from the beginning of April.

The figure was confirmed following the release of December's Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rate of inflation, which was four per cent.

All five providers currently calculate their price rises by adding 3.9 per cent to CPI inflation, making 7.9 per cent for 2024 (see box below).

Other companies add smaller amounts to the rate of inflation. Shell Energy for example adds two per cent, meaning its prices will rise by six per cent.

TalkTalk, meanwhile, adds 3.7 per cent, so its prices will rise by 7.7 per cent.

Virgin Media will hike prices by January's Retail Prices Index (RPI) inflation figure – which is announced in February – plus 3.9 per cent.

The RPI figure is usually higher than CPI, which means Virgin's increases are likely to exceed those of its rivals. If it stays at December's figure of 5.2 per cent, Virgin customers will pay 9.1 per cent more a month.

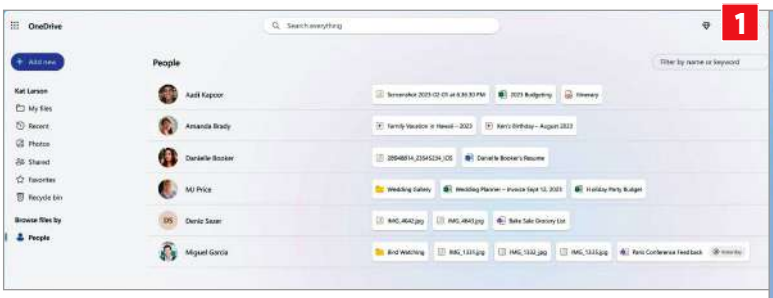
Sky doesn't base its price rises on inflation, and has yet to announce any rises for 2024. Last year it increased prices by an average of 8.1 per cent.

This is likely to be the last year companies are allowed to use inflation to set mid-contract price rises following Ofcom's proposal to ban the practice.

PRICE RISES BY PROVIDER

- **BT** 7.9% (CPI + 3.9%)
- **EE** 7.9% (CPI + 3.9%)
- **Plusnet** 7.9% (CPI + 3.9%)
- **Shell Energy** 6% (CPI + 2%)
- **TalkTalk** 7.7% (CPI + 3.7%)
- **Three** 7.9% (CPI + 3.9%)
- **Vodafone** 7.9% (CPI + 3.9%)

Find OneDrive files using people's faces



Microsoft has added a feature to OneDrive that presents lists of files next to photos of people you regularly share them with.

The company said it created the 'People' view (see screenshot 1) because "it can often be easier to remember who sent you a file instead of the file name".

The new feature is part of a OneDrive resdesign that should be rolled out to all users by the end of February.

Microsoft said the new look "reduces clutter and distractions, allowing you to focus on what's important – your content".

Also new are tabs at the top indicating different file types, such as Excel spreadsheet, PowerPoint presentation, Word document and PDF. Clicking a tab narrows your search to include only files of that type.

The 'Add new' button now has options for both uploading files and creating new documents 2.

Read more on Microsoft's blog: www.snipca.com/49169.

IN BRIEF

CHECK IF YOUR DETAILS HAVE BEEN LEAKED

Over 26 billion personal records have appeared online in one of the biggest ever leaks. It was found by SecurityDiscovery.com, which said much of the data comes from Chinese users. However, it also includes records from sites popular in other countries, including Adobe, Canva, Dropbox, LinkedIn, and JD.com. Read more on Cybernews (www.snipca.com/49163), and check whether your details have been exposed at www.snipca.com/49162.

NEW LIBREOFFICE AUTO-RECOVERS BY DEFAULT

LibreOffice has released a new edition (24.2) that turns on auto-recovery by default, meaning it saves past versions of your work that it can recover if the program crashes. Download it from www.snipca.com/49168, and for full list of new features visit www.snipca.com/49167. We'll begin explaining its best new tools in the Make Office Better section from our next issue.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

In its latest trick, Tesla's Optimus robot (pictured) has learned how to sneak around like a burglar trying not to wake its victims. Tesla boss Elon Musk posted a video on X (formerly Twitter) at www.snipca.com/49164. It all looks highly futuristic – except for the yellow price tag dangling from its arm.

IN BRIEF

HUGE CD-ROM ARCHIVE NOW BACK ONLINE
DiscMaster, which provides old CD-ROMs and floppy discs to download, is back online having been closed last June for maintenance. The site contains nearly 600 million downloads from the 1980s , 1990s and 2000s comprising images, documents, music, games, software, animations and videos. Visit https://discmaster.textfiles.com to search, and read more at www.snipca.com/49103.

SEE AXED TOOLS IN MICROSOFT GRAVEYARD
A new website lists tools and features Microsoft has closed, or plans to close in future. The creators of Microsoft Graveyard (https://microsoftgraveyard.com) say it's "a passion project built because we have lovingly used many of these products before their untimely death". Clicking the site's links takes you to the Wikipedia page about the feature or a news article.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

Deep-fried toothpicks are taking South Korea by storm. Thousands of people have shared videos of themselves cooking and eating this unlikely delicacy. They're made from sweet potato or corn starch, and can be flavoured with cheese, but the government warned they're potentially unsafe. Makes deep-fried Mars bars sound healthy.

Netflix axes its cheapest no-advert TV package

Netflix is to axe its cheapest advert-free package – the Basic plan – later this year.

It closed the option to new customers last year, but will now force existing subscribers to move to a new package.

Priced £7.99 a month, the Basic plan offers HD (720p) streaming on a single device, without adverts. It will close between April and June this year, Netflix said.

To continue watching without adverts subscribers will have to pay £10.99 a month for the Standard plan (Full HD 1080p, two devices), or £17.99 for the Premium plan (UltraHD 4K and four devices) – see details at www.snipca.com/49119.

Alternatively, subscribers can pay £4.99 a month for the 'Standard with adverts' plan, which is Full HD on two devices, but comes with "a few advert breaks"

The decision also affects paid-for TV services that include the Basic plan in their packages.

In December, Sky replaced the Basic tier with 'Standard with adverts' for new customers. However, existing subscribers have been able to keep Basic until they renewed their contracts.

Virgin Media has also ditched the Basic plan for new subscribers, which means EE TV (previously called BT TV) is the only pay-TV service continuing to provide Basic. But this is likely to end soon following Netflix's decision.

The demise of Basic comes as Netflix announced it had added more than 13.1 million subscriptions in the three months up to the end of December – the most for any quarter since 2020.

It added that in the 12 countries where 'Standard with adverts' is available, 40 per cent of the new sign-ups were for that plan.

Which Netflix plan do you subscribe to? Let us know letters@computeractive.co.uk

Ofcom to oversee BBC news online

Ofcom will soon be able to take action against the BBC's websites if they don't match the same standards expected of TV and radio broadcasts.

Currently, Ofcom oversees the BBC's TV, radio and iPlayer content, but has no formal power to act upon online material.

But the Government wants to extend Ofcom's scope to cover the BBC's websites, YouTube channel and posts on X (formerly Twitter).

The plans don't cover social-media comments made by presenters working as freelancers, such as Gary Lineker.

However, the Government will review how effectively the BBC's new social-media guidelines are working. It introduced these following a row over Lineker's social-media posts last year.

Ofcom said it welcomed the Government's proposals, "which will support us as we continue to hold the BBC to account on behalf of audiences".

Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said the Government wanted to ensure "a strong, independent BBC", but that it needed to adapt or risk losing the trust of audiences.

"We have recommended reforms that I believe will improve accountability while boosting public confidence in the BBC's ability to be impartial and respond to concerns raised by licence fee payers," she said.

A BBC spokesperson said "no other organisation takes its commitment to impartiality more seriously", and that it continues to get "the highest scores for impartiality and accuracy" from viewers.

Snipping Tool will let you add shapes to screenshots

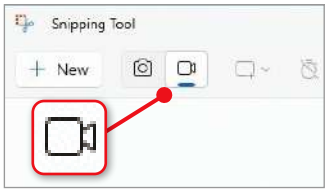
Microsoft is testing a feature that lets you add shapes to screenshots you take using Snipping Tool in Windows. It's part of a new Windows 11 preview build, though doesn't appear to be available to everyone.

The feature means you won't have to open a screenshot in Paint or other image-editing software to add shapes.

It was demonstrated on X (formerly Twitter) by the user PhantomOcean3, who drew a red rectangle with an orange outline, and a red arrow pointing to it (see screenshot above right, www.snipca.com/49135). The menu shows that you can also draw circles and diagonal lines.

PhantomOcean3 said that to activate the feature he had to change the settings of the Windows 11 preview build, which would be beyond the technical abilities of most people.

Some of his followers on X said the new tool reminded them of the popular screen-capture tool Snagit (www.snipca.com/49136), though that costs $63 (about £50) as a one-off purchase.



The feature is Microsoft's latest attempt to turn Snipping Tool into more than a simple program for taking screenshots. Last March, it added a screen-recorder to Snipping Tool, which you can use by clicking the Record (camcorder) icon – see screenshot below left.

It followed this in the autumn with a new 'Take actions' option that lets you extract text from screenshots using OCR, and redact sensitive contact information like phone numbers and email addresses.

BT customers charged £10 a month in error for Xbox Game Pass

BT has been charging some customers for Xbox Game Pass without their consent, adding £10 to their monthly bills.

Affected customers have received emails confirming the payment (pictured), the BBC reported. It begins by thanking them for activating their Xbox Game Pass Ultimate subscription, which costs £12.99 a month when bought separately.

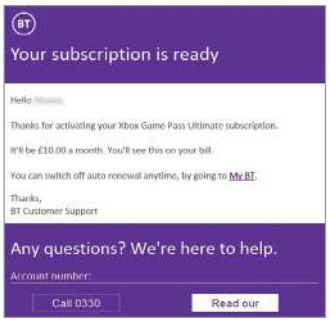
It then states the payment of £10 will be shown on the monthly bills.

Customers have been complaining about the problem on BT's Community forum for the past few months (www.snipca.com/49137).

One customer called Sue told the BBC: "Xbox Game Pass had been added to my accounts without my consent – I thought that's so odd, because I don't even have an Xbox. I actually thought I'd been hacked, so I phoned them up – and they explained that it was a BT error."

BT told another customer that the problem "was an issue between BT and Microsoft, where this was being kind of randomly enabled and activated on people's accounts".

A BT spokesperson apologised for the error and asked customers to "remain vigilant and if they notice changes to their account that are suspicious, to contact us as soon as possible to report this".



"We will support and guide them on how to take steps to ensure their account is secure," they added.

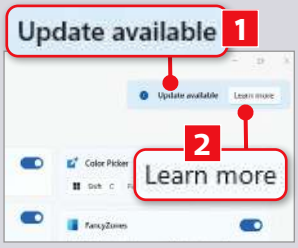
Most customers the BBC spoke to said BT has now refunded them.

Have you been mistakenly charged for Xbox Game Pass? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

DOWNLOAD NEW VERSION OF POWERTOYS

Microsoft has released version 0.78 of PowerToys, containing minor improvements and bug fixes. To check if it's ready on your PC, open PowerToys then look for an 'Update available' message top right (1 in our screenshot). If it's there, click 'Learn more' 2 then 'Install now' on the next page. See what's new in 0.78 at www.snipca.com/49153.



AMAZON DELIVERS IN 'RECORD' 75 MINUTES

Amazon claims it made its fastest ever delivery in the UK last year – reaching the doorstep in 75 minutes – though didn't say what the product was, nor where the customer lived. It also said globally it delivered a record seven billion items the same or next day, including more than two billion in Europe. Read more at www.snipca.com/49144.

TESCO MOBILE TO USE O2 FOR 10 MORE YEARS

Tesco Mobile will continue to use Virgin Media O2's phone network for the next 10 years after agreeing a deal with the firm. It's a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO), which means it piggybacks on Virgin's network rather than use one of its own. It has 5.5 million customers, making it the UK's biggest MVNO. For details see www.snipca.com/49147.

Does Freely's launch mean the death of Freeview?

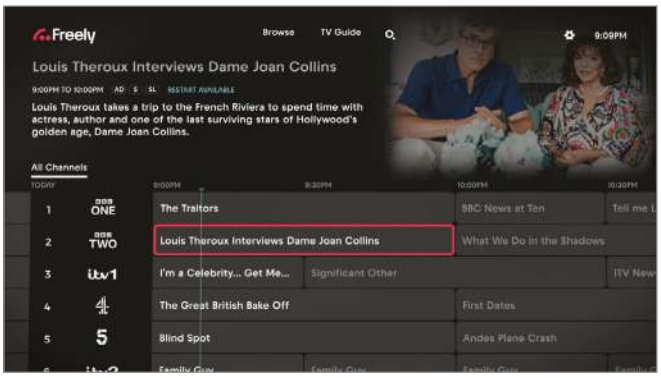
It's coming soon with features never seen before on free services

When Freeview arrived in 2002, BBC iPlayer was years away from launch, the UK's average broadband speed was 0.5Mbps and Netflix made money by posting DVDs to homes. Given the pace of change since, it seems almost incredible that Freeview is still around – let alone thriving as the UK's biggest TV platform. But the launch of a new service means its days might finally be numbered.

Freely is the fresh face on the screen, and it's the natural replacement for Freeview rather than its rival. It's run by the same company (Everyone TV), is backed by the same broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5), and is likely to include UKTV channels.

Also, like Freeview, all content will be free – although once again it's a definition of 'free' that somehow overlooks having to pay for a TV licence.

But it has one key difference: all the programmes are streamed over the internet, not through your aerial or satellite dish. That means it's also the replacement for Freesat, which launched in 2008 and is still used in two million homes.



Everyone TV announced Freely last September, and in early February confirmed it would launch in the second quarter of 2024 (April to June). It also revealed what the electronic programme guide (EPG) will look like – these are the menus you need to flick through to find something to watch (see screenshot above).

But it's features like the MiniGuide that Everyone TV hopes will tempt Freeview users to switch. This is a "pop-up interface" that appears each time you switch channels, letting you "easily discover related live or on demand content" (www.snipca.com/49180) – see screenshot below left. As you're watching *All Creatures Great and Small* on Channel 5, for example, you can scroll down to find other episodes and move to the right to see what's on next.

There's a Freely button on remote controls that opens the Browse feature to let you switch between live and on-demand content from one place. You can also pause and restart shows as they're being broadcast. These are the kind of tools that viewers expect from services like Sky, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Everyone TV claims that they've never been on a 'free' TV service before.

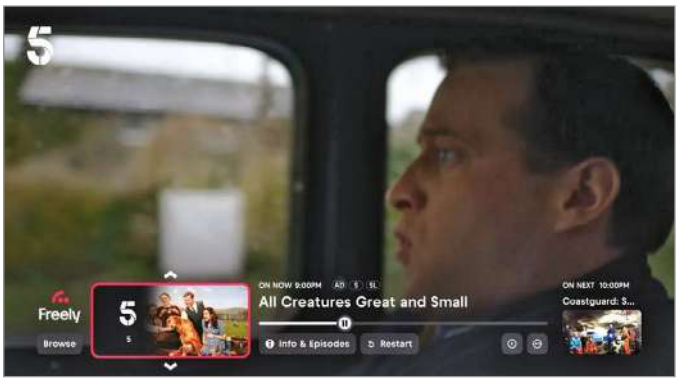
Yet there's plenty we still don't know about Freely, such as what audio and video standards it'll use and what the broadcast quality will be – HD, 4K (UltraHD) or HDR? More importantly, Everyone TV hasn't said what internet speed you'll need, though it's unlikely to be higher than the 3-6Mbps required to stream HD video.

Most people will have fast enough broadband to watch Freely. But a bigger obstacle will be persuading viewers to buy new equipment to get Freely. And it won't be cheap. Rather than a box as with Freeview, you'll need to splash out on a brand new TV (and there are many reasons why you shouldn't do that – see next issue's Cover Feature).

Chinese manufacturer Hisense has said it will make TVs with Freely built in, as has the Turkish firm Vestel, which makes Toshiba, Hitachi, Polaroid, JVC, Bush and Alba TVs. Prices haven't been announced yet.

Freeview is still watched by 37 per cent of UK households (16 million), so Freely won't be a success overnight. But it doesn't need to be. Everyone TV says 15 per cent (4 million) of homes already get their TV over the internet only, and expects this to reach more than half of homes by 2030.

However, until then – and probably for a long time after that – Freeview will survive. After all, it'll take a while for 16 million people to buy new TVs.



It *should* happen to a set: Freely will let you restart live broadcasts and switch to on-demand content

THE FACTS

- Freely – the long-term replacement for Freeview and Freesat – will launch between April and June
- Freely streams programmes to homes over the internet, rather than transmit them via an aerial or satellite dish
- You'll need to buy a new TV to get it, but prices haven't been announced yet

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

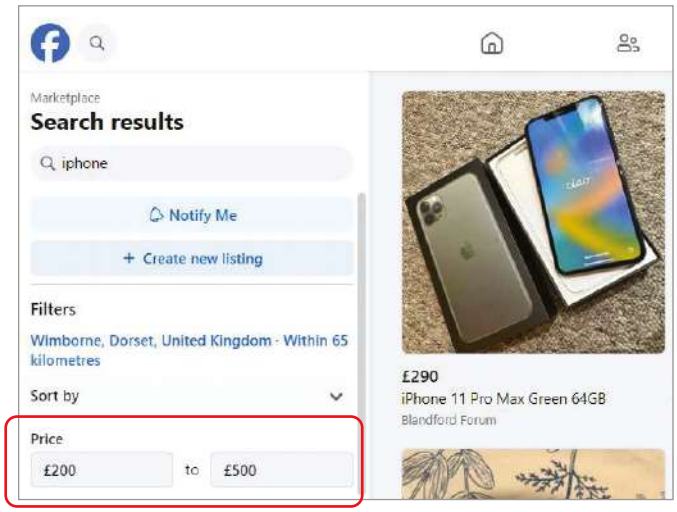
WATCH OUT FOR...

Scam adverts on Facebook Marketplace

What's the threat?

More than a third of adverts on Facebook Marketplace could be scams, according to analysis from the TSB fraud team. Posing as genuine buyers, researchers contacted 100 sellers on the site and found that 34 were fake. It estimated that UK buyers are losing around £160,000 a day after making purchases from the site.

The scammers used common tactics, such as refusing to answer questions and instead directing researchers to fake websites. They also refused to show the items in person and demanded advanced fees. Many of the items were advertised as "brand new" for hundreds of pounds less than their real price. For example, the team found an iPhone 13 selling for £84, much lower than its retail price of £599.



TSB said that cars and vehicle parts were the most common items to appear in scam adverts, featuring in 21 per cent, followed by phones, shoes/clothing and games consoles (see the full list at www.snipca.com/49071). It added that Marketplace accounts for 73 per cent of all purchase fraud it investigates.

How can you stay safe?

There are several warning signs that a Facebook Marketplace advert is fake. First, be suspicious of any prices that seem too good to be true. You can stop these appearing in your results by setting the price range you want to search (see screenshot).

Also, never trust sellers who ask to talk to you outside of Facebook Messenger. They normally do this so they can organise payment and postage. But Marketplace is, in Facebook's words, a "local meet-up and collection service". You're meant to hand over cash in person, not send payment remotely like with eBay or Amazon Marketplace.

New tools | AdGuard Temp Mail

www.snipca.com/49074

Signing up for a service often requires you to confirm your account by opening an email sent to you. If you'd rather keep your email address private – and reduce the risk of getting spammed – use temporary (or 'disposable') email addresses when signing up instead.

There are plenty of safe and effective options, such as Guerrilla Mail (www.snipca.com/40345) and Temp Mail (https://temp-mail.org). Joining these is a new tool from AdGuard, taking a break from its day job blocking adverts (see page 74).

To use it, visit the link above, then click the email address in the box (1 in our screenshot) to copy it. Paste this into the service you're signing up to and any emails from it will appear in your inbox on AdGuard's site 2. You can then open the email and confirm your account. Emails are deleted after 24 hours, while the email addresses AdGuard creates work for seven days.

Note that you shouldn't confuse temporary addresses with email-forwarding services such as Firefox Relay (see page 60 for advice on those).

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers

'Update' TV Licence scam

There's an email going around that claims you need to update your bank details to pay the TV Licence. It says your bank has declined the payment and you must provide new details to "stay licensed". That clunky phrase smacks of a scam, but the email contains the correct logo so I'm sure some people will be fooled. There's a button you're supposed to click labelled 'Update@DirectDirect', which sounds just as clunky. It's not a sophisticated scam, but there are millions of potential targets so it's bound to prove lucrative for the criminals behind it. See Action Fraud's warning: www.snipca.com/49065.

Roy Carlin

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Patronising to compare broadband price rise to coffee

I'm pleased that BT has confirmed that it will abandon price increases linked to inflation, but I found their announcement patronising. CEO Marc Allera compared the new rise of £3 to "about the price of a takeaway coffee every month" (Issue 676, page 7).

I understand he's trying to say that in the grand scheme of things, £3 a month isn't a lot. But his error is to compare an essential item like broadband with an unnecessary purchase like coffee. It was a flippant comment that fails to appreciate how reliant all of us are on reliable broadband – which is ironic, given that it must be Mr Allera's aim to get us all signed up to ultra-fast connections.

Pat O'Shea

Only Google and Amazon make money from adverts

While understanding his conclusions, I disagree with John Young's opinion (Letters, Issue 675) that adverts help to keep the internet free. Adverts can be obstructive, while the push to get the 'correct' (ie, targeted) adverts in front of the viewer is intrusive and creepy.

Less competent sites (I'm thinking of a specific national newspaper) flood their pages with nonsensical links to pages that I consider to be nothing more than the nastier type of clickbait.

From my own experience, I can't understand how the advertiser makes money, nor how it's worthwhile for the website. I tried advertising two of my self-published books. Admittedly, I paid Amazon the minimum to advertise, only willing to spend more if income was generated. But in the end I didn't make enough money to cover my costs. It was a flop.

I've looked into getting adverts on my motor-racing site, but if someone clicks a link they just leave my site and don't return – especially if they don't like where they've been directed to. As for earnings per click, one needs tens of thousands to even earn enough for the occasional treat. The only ads I carry are for my two books and merchandise. The books are on a sidebar, with the merchandise links being easily missed. That's probably why I don't make any sales.

It's ironic that, with the internet being flooded with adverts, the income generated by them is so diminished that only the likes of Google are making sizeable profits.

Peter Tattersall

I disagree with John Young. We already pay for the internet through our monthly contracts with internet providers. Adverts will always be there because it's all about money, money, money. I'll actively pursue ways to block adverts from as many and all platforms as possible because I don't want to be force-fed rubbish I don't need.

Having said that, I find that my brain has started to tune out advertising. For instance, I can easily scroll past the nonsense on Facebook without registering what's being sold. Further, for the equally annoying adverts that appear on TV, muscle memory has me pressing the mute button without a second thought.

Rob Forsdyke

CA SAYS **One way you can avoid adverts on some TVs is by installing AdGuard's blocker, though it's not free. Robert Irvine explains how to do it on page 74.**

BT Digital Phone a nightmare for 100-year-old neighbour

In Issue 675 Graham Simmons explained how his transfer to BT Digital Voice was "seamless". All I can say is – lucky you! I help a 100-year-old neighbour with technical issues. While she was endeavouring to top up her pay-as-you-go (PAYG) mobile with BT, she somehow managed to get upgraded to a whole mobile, landline and broadband package with EE. It was cheaper overall, but was also the start of a nightmare.

The first sign that things weren't going swimmingly was when EE told her they would need to dig up her pavement and garden to install fibre to the home. That dragged on for about a week. Then a whole load of gear arrived – a new router, Wi-Fi extender, two digital phones, an Android tablet and a mobile SIM, with no indication of who was going to install all this. I rang EE, told them their customer was very old and they sent an engineer to install everything.

When the engineer left, the digital phones weren't working, but he said they'd go live in a few hours. They didn't. Neither did the telecare device. So, two days before my friend's 100th birthday, she was left with no phone and no lifeline, and very distressed that no one could call her on her landmark birthday.

During the course of the next week I spent many hours calling EE trying to get the phones fixed. Apparently, they were having problems with the firmware in the new router (according to two staff who probably shouldn't have told me that). After a week of worry for her, the phones

What's the Issue...?

I seem to recall you recommending a program for converting and sending large PDFs? When was that?

Katherine Reynolds

CA SAYS **It was in Issue 669's 'What Should I Download?' section – page 20.**

I would like to know more about SSDs. Which issues should I look at?

Keith Griffiths

CA SAYS **Read our 'Speed up your SSDs for free' Cover Feature in Issue 655.**

When was your last big report on the looming copper switch-off?

Robert Briggs

CA SAYS **That was our Cover Feature in Issue 659. Read it and the two articles above on our Back Issue 2023 CD: www.snipca.com/48860.**

eventually worked and I installed a new telecare device which uses a mobile signal, not the router – though at a premium of £50 extra a year.

Allan Postgate

CA SAYS **Allan's neighbour isn't the only person to have had problems with BT's digital phones – read the lead case in Consumeractive on page 14.**

A3 printers are better than A4

Your review of the Brother MFC-J6540dw printer (Issue 675, page 24, www.snipca.com/48747, pictured below) was very useful because few articles ever mention the size of the various printers reviewed. We generally have to assume, or guess, that they are A4 printers. While the extra weight is a price we have to pay, being able to print on a greater variety of paper sizes above A4 is extremely useful. But the most desirable feature is having an A3 (or A3+) printer/scanner – these are more flexible and easier to manage.

I'm sure most of us at some point have wanted to copy something which is A4, but has a spine or binding of some sort. Trying to scan this sort of item without exposing one or more edges is nigh on impossible with an A4 scanner.

Before buying the Epson WorkForce WF-7720DTWF A3 printer/scanner/copier (now discontinued), I had an HP A4 printer with A4 scanner. It was the frustration I experienced using that scanner which made me decide that my next printer would have an A3 scanner.

Maybe I'm an oddity, but I believe it's a pity that manufacturers don't seem to value this versatility when coming up with new models of printers with scanners. The price of a standalone A3 scanner is far more.

IM Williams

CA SAYS **The Brother MFC-J6540dw is an excellent printer, but since our review its price has shot up from £199 to £307. It's bound to come down again in sales, but until then we'll look for cheaper A3 printers to test.**

STAR LETTER

'AI PC' is meaningless until it can do all this

You got it spot on when questioning whether the term 'AI PC' has any real meaning in Issue 676's 'Question of the Fortnight' (pictured). Microsoft adding the Copilot key to keyboards doesn't cut the mustard. It just gives us another key to try to avoid accidentally typing with fat fingers.

I'm not even sure I'd want AI controlling my PC, but if I did have an AI PC here's what I'd expect it to do. It would learn to recognise my voice and turn on when I spoke a specific phrase. In fact, it would also log into Windows automatically. It would then recognise that I had sat down and would launch my browser and load the websites that I check every day.

It would then respond to me asking to write an email by opening my webmail. I'd then dictate the message and send it all without touching my keyboard. If I was writing a formal email – to my solicitor say – it would suggest ways to improve the phrasing.

Question of the Fortnight

Will you need 16GB of RAM to run Windows 12?

Reports say computers will soon need a lot more memory

THE FACTS

When working in Excel, it would suggest formulas that would prove useful based on what I had entered into the cells. When creating a presentation in PowerPoint, it would recommend styles and transitions to suit what I was writing. If I started a video call, it would adjust the screen and microphone accordingly, based on who I was calling and where I was.

Finally, when I was ready to save all my work and log off for the day, it would do this by reacting to another voice command. Until AI can do all that, then using the term to describe computers is marketing nonsense.

Donald Mellor

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Rural communities face hell in power cuts

I stay (the colloquial term for 'live') in Scotland, but luckily I'm urban. As a curler, I regularly speak to folk all over the country arranging games. After storms, power lines are often down and phone masts are inoperative. Now, we're not talking about being out of power for six hours. These power cuts can be considerably longer, regardless of what the power companies promise. Outages of 48 or 72 hours are commonplace.

There's little point in having a booster battery (typically lasting only one hour) if there's no signal in the first place. Our metropolitan masters have no concept of the potential hell they are letting loose on our rural populations.

Edward Baines

People too bone idle to read smart meters

I enjoyed reading your article on whether the 3G switch-off will stop smart meters working (Issue 675, page 62). In particular, the 'Do smart meters really save energy?' box was interesting. Most of the population are too bone idle to read their own meters, so that's why they have trouble. I read mine once a week and send the figures to my energy supplier once a month. No problem.

Alan Heasman

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

LEAD CASE

My BT phone has never worked, so can I get refund?

Q My contract with BT expired in December and because a new contract was reasonably priced I signed up for Halo3+ (www.bt.com/exp/halo), which is 'hybrid' broadband backed up by an EE mobile connection. My package includes a digital phone (pictured), but this has never worked. BT keeps pushing repairs back. Can I get any money back?

Chris Lodge

A Yes, BT must refund Chris because it has signed up to Ofcom's voluntary automatic-compensation scheme. Under this, Chris is entitled to £5.83 for each calendar day (ie, including Saturdays and Sundays) since installation that the phone hasn't worked. Additionally, BT must pay him £29.15 for any appointments missed or cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice.

Most other major providers have signed up to the scheme, including Plusnet, Sky, TalkTalk, Virgin Media and Zen Internet – see the full list and more details at www.snipca.com/49070.

What's good about this scheme is that companies have to pay it to you automatically, saving you the hassle of chasing them. BT has 30 days to process the refund after it has fixed the problem, or Chris cancels his contract. He should tell the company whether he wants this money paid into his BT account or bank account.

If Chris wants to leave BT, we think he'd have a good case for cancelling his contract early without paying a fee. He'd have to pay for any broadband used, but BT should refund the proportion of the bills that account for his phone line.

CASE ONGOING

What should I do if my emails are ignored?

Q In November, I ordered a frying pan online from HexClad (www.hexclad.co.uk) as a Christmas present. When opened, it contained two flaws. We sent it back on 6 January and received email confirmation. Five days later HexClad sent a lid by way of apology, but I'm still waiting for the pan. They're ignoring my emails, so what should I do?

Howard Angel

A Howard should try emailing HexClad's CEO Daniel Winer (**daniel@hexclad.com**). He may not read it, but one of his staff almost certainly will. In our experience, going straight to the top is the most successful way to get a resolution when a customer-support team won't reply.

He's entitled to a refund, and should point this out to the CEO. But because more than 30 days have passed since purchase, HexClad is allowed to replace or repair the pan. If it continues to ignore him, Howard could report the company to Trading Standards. We've contacted HexClad twice, but haven't received a response. It's a US company, but does have UK offices in Bristol. We'll keep pursuing it.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Temu refunds reader – but then items turn up

What happens if you receive a refund for a delivery you think will never turn up, but then subsequently arrives? That's what reader Sharon Styles asked us after some items she bought from Temu (www.temu.com) arrived just a few days after it had refunded her (see Issue 676).

Sharon is allowed to keep these items because Temu had told her she could if they eventually turned up. The site was unable to locate them, so it must have assumed they had gone missing.

However, this doesn't apply in every case. It's entirely down to the retailer involved, so you need to contact it and ask what you should do. It's entitled to collect the items, though it can't force you to pay for their return. If the value is low, it may decide it's cheaper to let you keep the products.

Like all retailers, Temu had 30 days to deliver the items, though it had given Sharon an earlier estimated date. It first said it would wait the full 30 days before giving her money back, but actually did so a few days before this deadline.

You're only entitled to receive items before 30 days if you've paid for an earlier delivery. If the retailer misses this deadline, you can cancel your order and claim a full refund.

Have I been ripped off by Facebook advert?

Q I spent £39.99, paying through PayPal, to buy some mastic for household repairs from a company advertising on Facebook. I thought it was based in the UK, but then I received emails informing me it had been sent, and that it was going through American customs.

I then received an email saying the item had been delivered, but it still hasn't arrived. The company apologised, but has since gone silent.

Have I been ripped off?

Mark Trencher

A It's possible. A lot of rogue companies advertise on Facebook, and there are plenty of Marketplace scams too (see page 11). The site claims it acts fast to punish firms that break its rules, but this seems to do little to deter scammers. The problem for Mark is that while foreign companies trading in the UK should abide by our consumer law, it's often very hard to track them down and get a refund.

We investigated the company and it's actually based in China, not the US. We'll try to contact it, but in the meantime Mark should raise a complaint through PayPal. If the company responds to PayPal by claiming the item has been delivered, Mark should point out that it may have been sent to the US instead – referencing the email saying it had passed through US customs.

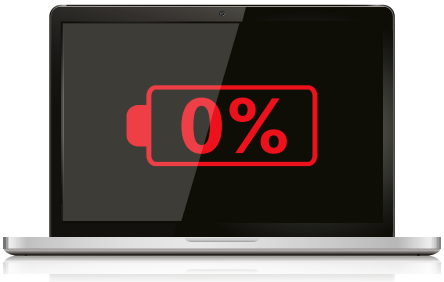
This is a messy case, but we think Mark has enough evidence to seek a refund from PayPal. We'll let you know if he succeeds.

CASE ONGOING

Is shop allowed to repair laptop before a refund?

Q I bought a refurbished Acer laptop from a local computer shop just before Christmas for £345. It worked fine at first, but now I have real problems getting it to connect to the internet. Sometimes it randomly shuts down because the battery loses power. The shop says it will repair it, but I want my money back. Can it refuse to refund me?

James McDonald



A Yes it can if more than 30 days have passed since James bought the laptop. Only within the first 30 days can you demand a full refund for inherently faulty goods. The retailer can then attempt to repair or replace the laptop. If either of these fail within six months of purchase then James can demand a full refund.

Also within six months, James doesn't have to prove that the fault is inherent. Instead, the onus is on the shop to demonstrate that he damaged it. After six months, the shop can ask James to provide evidence that the fault is inherent. In this scenario, he'd probably have to pay to get it inspected.

It's important to note that this law applies to both new and refurbished devices. The latter aren't expected to last as long, but they must still be of satisfactory quality, fit for purpose and as described. It doesn't sound like James's laptop is any of those.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

ieGeek's software helped fixed security camera

I bought a security camera from ieGeek (https://uk.iegeek.com) to cover the outside of the house. It's well built, was reasonably priced and has all the features that more expensive cameras have. However, after six months the light started coming on without being activated.

I emailed ieGeek's customer services and received a reply within the hour saying they would come up with a solution in eight hours. They were true to their word and sent me instructions in plain English on how to reset the software. This did the trick.

I thanked them for their prompt reply, and they told me to get in touch if I had any further problems. The responses were courteous and polite, which is not always the case with other companies. I think they deserve recognition for their prompt service.

Roger Brydges

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact ieGeek

- **Email** service@iegeek.com
- **Online** www.snipca.com/49069

Grow Your Family Tree

If your ancestors sought a better life across the Atlantic, follow **Judith Batchelor's** advice to…

Search US immigration records

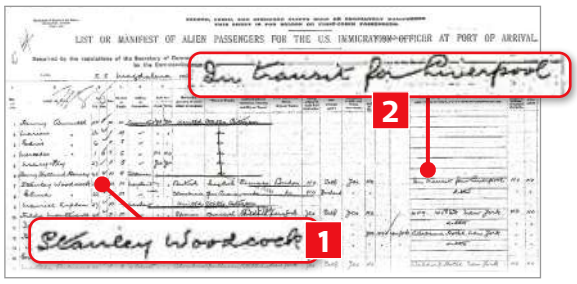
New York was the main gateway to the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. From 1820 to 1892, immigrants landed at Castle Garden (now called Castle Clinton) at the southern tip of Manhattan, before Ellis Island took over in 1892.

Explore the Ellis Island Passenger Search database

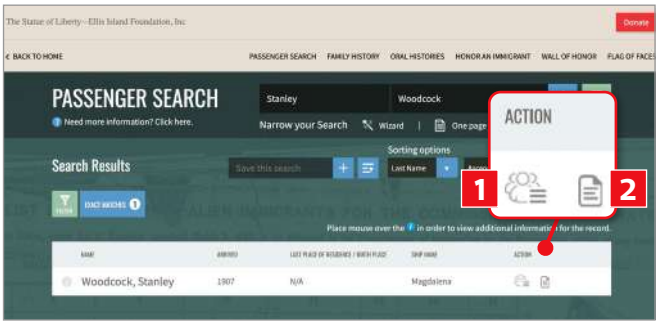
Start by typing your ancestor's name into the Ellis Island Passenger Search database (www.snipca.com/49053), which contains records from 1820 to 1957. If you're unsure of the spelling click one of the filters below, such as Close Matches, Sounds Like or Alternative Spellings. To narrow your results, click 'One page form' and enter details such as marital status, age on arrival and port of departure. You'll need to create a free account to view any records.

Search for original ethnic names because these were usually recorded at the port of departure even if they were later changed. Family groups were listed together, making it easier than in other records to search for children with distinctive names. Abbreviations are common in early records, so William may be listed as Wm, and married women – for example, Sarah Jones – may just be recorded as Mrs Jones. You'll find more tips at www.snipca.com/49054.

Don't use search filters for ancestors arriving after 1924, which is when Ellis Island became a place of detention. These records are indexed by year of arrival and given a placeholder day of 1 January, so you won't get any results if you search by a specific day or month of arrival.



Judith's ancestor Stanley Woodcock arrived in New York in June 1907 on his way to Liverpool



Search for your ancestor then select Passenger Record or Ship Manifest for more information

See more details on Ship Manifests

In the search results you'll see two icons under Action: Passenger Record and Ship Manifest (1 and 2 in our screenshot left). Click the former and you'll see your ancestor's passenger ID, ship name, arrival date and port of departure.

You can also buy a certificate for $30 (about £23.60). These are records kept by ships that list passengers' nationality, place of birth, occupation, last place of residence and even the amount of money they had.

If you see SI (Special Inquiry) in a Ship Manifest it means the person was detained and held on Ellis Island, probably because they were sick or were likely to become public charge – ie, not be able to support themselves.

The records also cover travellers passing through New York to catch a ship sailing elsewhere. That's why my ancestor Stanley Woodcock is documented in a Ship Manifest (1 in our screenshot above). He arrived in New York with his wife Elena on the Magdalena on 20 June, 1907, and is recorded as being 'in transit to Liverpool' 2.

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

In the 1950s I was sent to stay with a lovely couple in Yeovil, before being returned to my real mother in South Woodford in the late Fifties/early Sixties. I've requested data from the local councils, but both said they have no information about me. Where can I find more details about why I was handed over? My mother was unmarried at the time.

Wayne Serveld

It can be difficult to find details of children who have been fostered or taken into care. Try contacting The Care Leavers' Association (www.snipca.com/49051), who might help locate your file. Also get in touch with charitable or religious organisations such as Barnardo's (www.barnardos.org.uk) and the Children's Society (www.childrenssociety.org.uk). Further advice can be found in the National Archives (www.snipca.com/49052).

Have a genealogy question for Judith? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search apprenticeship records

G-MASTER GCB4580DQSN-B1

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE GAME WITH THE CURVED GCB4580DQSN RED EAGLE

Unleash a panoramic visual experience with this 45" ultra-wide DQHD 5120x1440 resolution 32:9 gaming display.
With 165Hz refresh rate and 0.8ms MPRT response time the force is with you!
Make split second decisions and be sure of sharp and smooth images on screen.

VA | 5120 x 1440 | CURVED 1500R | 0.8ms | HDMI DISPLAY PORT | AMD FreeSync

Find your monitor
gmaster.iiyama.com

Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

IMAGE VIEWER

Handy Viewer 2.0

www.snipca.com/49155
What you need: Windows 7, 8, 10 or 11

As big fans of IrfanView and FastStone Image Viewer, we approached this new image viewer with a degree of scepticism – what could it possibly offer that those programs don't? So we were pleasantly surprised to find that Handy Viewer packs lots of useful features into its lightweight, easy-to-use interface. Although this is version 2.0, it was only made publicly available at the start of this year and has already made several improvements.

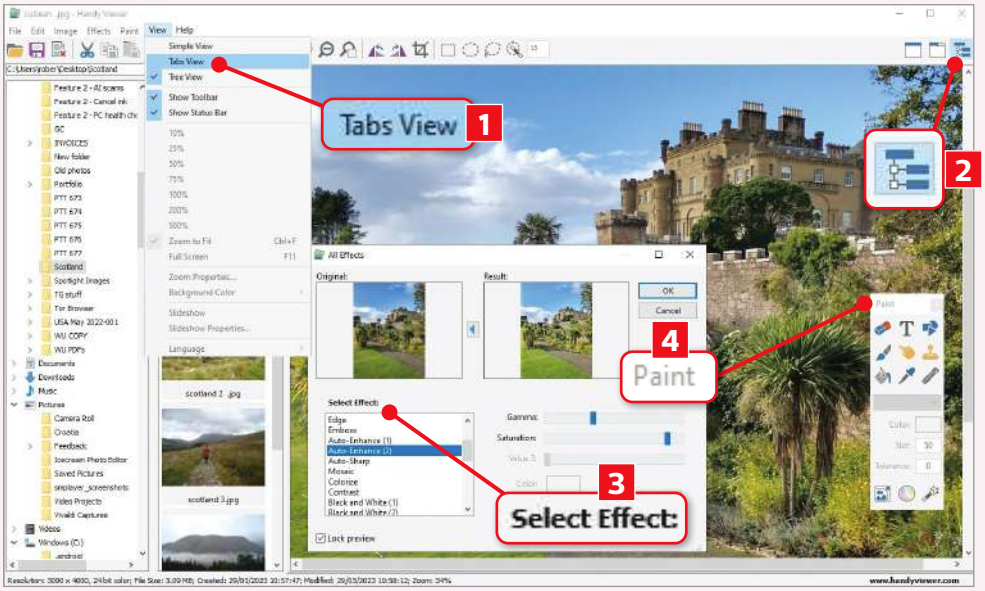
Most notably, unlike the programs mentioned above, Handy Viewer offers tabbed browsing, so you can open and switch between dozens of photos – just click the View menu and choose Tabs View. It also goes beyond the basic editing tools you find in most image viewers (such as crop, rotate and colour correction) to offer all kinds of creative effects and enhancements.

In the Image menu, you'll find options for removing red-eye from photos, converting them to black-and-white, and inverting their colours. But it's the Effects Browser that really impressed us, as it lets you do everything from tinting, blurring and warping images to applying mosaic, pencil-sketch and reflection effects. Further options are available in the Paint menu, including the ability to erase, clone and retouch elements of pictures, and add text and shapes.

Handy Viewer supports more than 150 image and video formats (though you can't edit the latter), and lets you browse folders in a 'tree' view, similar to FastStone's, and as a slideshow – like in IrfanView.

Its main flaw is that it doesn't label its toolbar options or display tooltips when you hover your cursor over them. You can either guess what the buttons do, read Handy Viewer's online manual at www.snipca.com/49156 or access tools through its menus instead.

When you install Handy Viewer, it offers to set itself as your default program for image formats, but you can untick this option if you're unsure.



1 Handy Viewer offers several ways to explore images stored on your PC, including a tabbed-browsing view. Click 'Tabs View' in the View menu, then click the File menu and choose Open to select pictures to open in separate tabs.

2 To browse folders of images in a tree-style view, click the button in the top-right corner of the main window or choose Tree View in the View menu. Select a folder to display its contents on the right, then click a photo to view and edit it.

3 Open the Effects Browser from the Effects menu or by pressing Ctrl+E. Choose an effect in the list on the left to apply it to the current photo, and compare the original with the result. You can fine-tune the effect using the sliders.

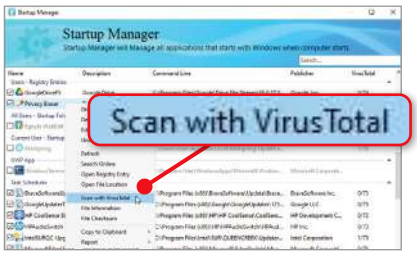
4 Click the Paint menu and choose Show Paint Tools, or press Ctrl+P, to open the Paint toolbar. This includes options for erasing and cloning elements in photos, adding text and shapes, and blending colours using brushes.

SOFTWARE UNINSTALLER

HiBit Uninstaller 3.1.81

www.snipca.com/49145

What you need: Windows 7, 8, 10 or 11



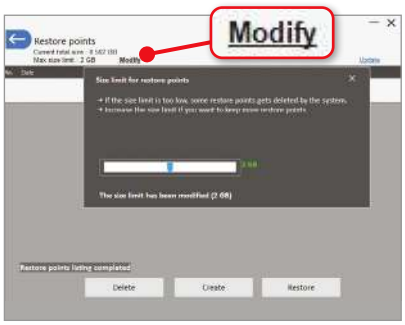
Your 15th favourite program of 2023 (see Issue 674, get it from www.snipca.com/49146) has received its first update of 2024. The biggest change is to HiBit Uninstaller's VirusTotal scanner, which checks that programs and services running on your PC are safe to use. This has been redesigned to provide faster scans for malware through the dozens of antivirus engines used by VirusTotal (www.virustotal.com). Click the Tools menu and select one of the 'manager' options, such as Process Manager, Startup Manager or Context Menu Manager. Check the VirusTotal column to see how many antivirus engines have detected threats in the listed programs or processes. You can scan entries manually by right-clicking them and choosing 'Scan with VirusTotal' (see screenshot). HiBit Uninstaller has also improved its removal of leftover traces after you uninstall software.

PRIVACY CLEANER

PrivaZer 4.0.82

www.snipca.com/49149

What you need: Windows 7, 8, 10 or 11



PrivaZer is one of the most powerful free tools for erasing traces of your PC and web activities. The latest version improves the program's scans of SSDs, so it can detect and delete more files in your drive's free space – including references to items you've previously removed. Click 'Scan in-depth' on the home screen and select your SSD to perform a thorough privacy scan and clean-up. PrivaZer has also updated its 'Restore points' feature, which lets you create system-restore points before you wipe files from your PC. You can now increase the size limit of restore points, so Windows doesn't automatically delete smaller back-ups. Choose 'Restore + Repair' on the home screen, followed by Restore Points. Click the Modify link next to 'Max size limit' (see screenshot) and use the slider to set the minimum restore-point size, from 1GB to 3GB.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Stardock Start11

www.snipca.com/49148

Price: £6.99 **Free trial:** 30 days

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

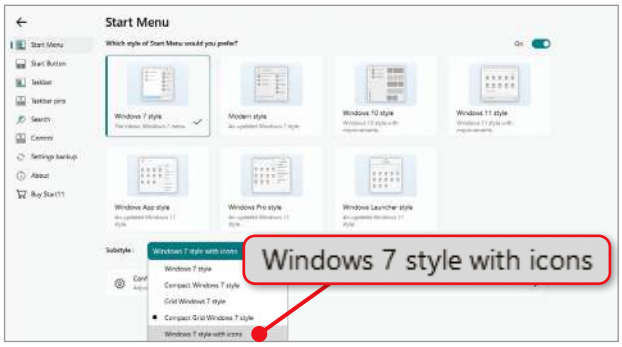
Although Microsoft has made several improvements to Windows 11 since its release, it still hasn't fixed the controversial Start menu. Start11 replaces the menu with a design that reflects your taste and needs, and it works in both Windows 10 and 11.

It lets you choose from seven Start-menu styles, which range from the classic Windows 7 look to a Windows 11 design 'with improvements'. Your choice is applied instantly, so you can see if it works for you, with some styles offering further customisation options, such as including icons (see screenshot) or using a compact layout.

We particularly like that you can also set your preferred Start-button image, from more than 20 designs, including orbs, triangles and traditional Windows logos. In Windows 11, you need to first click the Taskbar tab and switch on 'Let Start11 enhance the taskbar' to override the operating system's default setting.

Other options allow you to align your taskbar buttons to the left, right or centre, change the bar's colour and transparency, and replace Windows search with Start11's own search tool or the popular program Everything (www.snipca.com/49170). You can also pin files, folders and – as of the latest version – websites to the Start menu, for speedy access.

All these features, plus more, and a smart, simple interface make Start11 a cut above the free Start-menu-replacement tool Open-Shell (www.snipca.com/49154).



OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

For a one-off purchase of £7, Start11 is great value for a tool you'll enjoy the benefits of whenever you use your PC. It makes changing your Start menu so easy that you can choose a new design every day.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

Can I add audio to a series of screenshots?

Q I'd like to record narration to accompany some important screenshots for a presentation. Is there a free tool that does this?

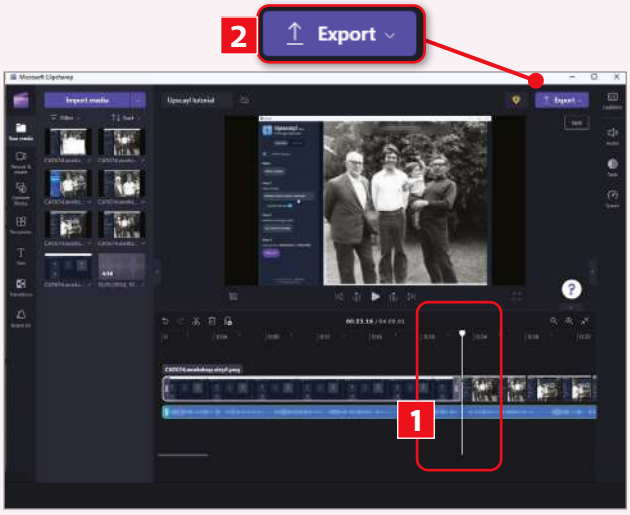
Bob Nesmith

A The easiest way to do this is to create a slideshow of your screenshots, then record an audio track over the top before exporting the result as a video file. The free version of Microsoft's Clipchamp can do this. It comes installed on most Windows 11 machines, but if you can't find it, or you're running Windows 10, install it from the Microsoft Store at www.snipca.com/48992.

In Clipchamp, choose the option to create a new video from scratch. Next, record your audio by switching to the 'Record & create' tab and clicking Audio. Grant Clipchamp access to your microphone, then click the red record button and start talking. When you've finished, click Stop. Play your recording back, then click 'Retake recording' if you want to re-record it, or 'Save and edit' to add it to your slideshow.

Now click the 'Import media' button to add your screenshots to the 'Your media' tab on the left. Hover your cursor over each one then click the green + (plus) button that pops up to add it to the timeline. You'll see each one appear for five seconds. To adjust this to match your audio, click and drag on the right-hand edge (1 in our screenshot).

Once you're ready to share the video, click Export 2 and choose 720p or 1080p to save the file or share it online.



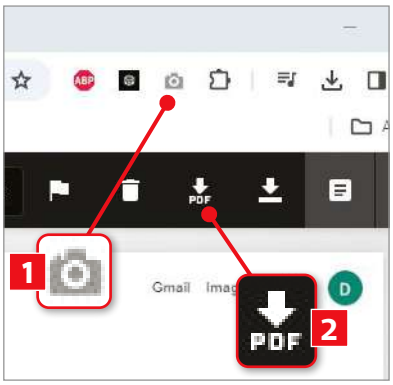
Can I make a book out of my photos?

Q I've recently returned from visiting relatives in Australia and want to make an album using photos of my trip that are on my phone. I'd like to add text and make a book. Somebody suggested Snapfish (www.snipca.com/49003). Do you recommend this?

Diana Stephens

A Snapfish is a good choice, but we prefer FreePrints (www.snipca.com/49004). This UK company offers a 20-page soft-cover photobook every month for just the price of delivery (£1.49-£3.99). Install the FreePrints app from the Google Play Store or Apple App Store, then import all the photos from your phone. Select the photos you want to include, then crop and rotate them accordingly, and arrange page layouts to accommodate your photos (see screenshot) and add captions (optional).

How do I create a scrolling screenshot?



Q In Issue 673 (page 51) you explained how to uninstall the Edge browser. But if I do this, what can I use instead of its excellent web-capture tool to create a scrolling screenshot?

Richard Saunders

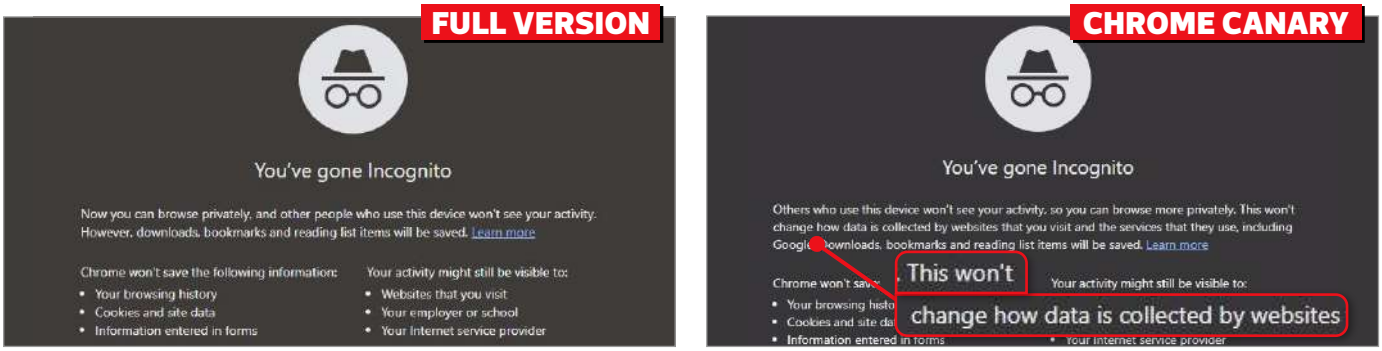
A It depends which browser you switch to. For example, Vivaldi (www.snipca.com/49005) has a screenshot tool that can capture an entire web page – just click the camera button on the toolbar at the bottom of the Vivaldi window, leave 'Full Page' selected and click Capture. For Chromium browsers like Chrome, Brave and Opera you'll need to install an extension. The best one is GoFullPage (www.snipca.com/49006). Once installed, click the camera icon (1 in our screenshot) to capture the entire page, then save as a PDF 2 or image.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and misbehaving software

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Google updates Chrome's Incognito terms



Can you play Chrome's game of spot the difference? We've made it easy for you

Google knew exactly what it was doing back in 2008 when it used the word 'Incognito' to name the more private version of Chrome. It sounds exciting, like you're browsing the web undercover, and is more open to interpretation than 'anonymous'. As a result, people have been using Incognito mode without properly understanding what it does.

Many users assume that it blocks sites from collecting your data, but it was never designed for this. What it mainly does is stop your browsing history being saved, preventing other people who use your computer from seeing what sites you've visited. Chrome's terms have always said this, but previously it never clearly stated that websites can actually track you in Incognito mode.

Google has finally come clean, but only after being threatened with a $5bn class-action lawsuit in the US that accuses it of illegally invading the privacy of users. Chrome's updated terms now say that going incognito "won't change how data is collected by websites you visit and the services they use, including Google".

However, this change only appears when you go incognito in Chrome Canary, which is an early "unstable" version for testing new features – and therefore used by hardly anyone. Go incognito in the full version of Chrome and you'll still see the old wording. Compare our screenshots and you'll notice the difference.

And Chrome's new wording still isn't explicit enough for us. Google should state what it *really* means – ie, that websites can see what you do and show you targeted adverts if you sign into your account. Or, better still, it could advise people to switch to Brave and be done with it.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

eBay www.snipca.com/49114 "Our strategy is the right one, but there is more we can do to ensure our success. We need to better organize our teams for speed – allowing us to be more nimble, bring like-work together, and help us make decisions more quickly. Today, I am sharing news about changes we are implementing to better position eBay for long-term, sustainable growth."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Our strategy is so 'right' we've fired 1,000 staff, who are now looking for 'like-work'.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

DPD's chatbot

If you can't get any sensible answers from the next chatbot you speak to, try asking it to write a haiku poem describing how terrible it is. That's what Ashley Beauchamp did when talking to the chatbot run by courier firm DPD, and it happily obliged (see screenshot).

He also persuaded the chatbot to say that DPD is the "worst delivery firm in the world" and that it wouldn't recommend the service to anyone. And to top it off, he prompted the chatbot to use a very naughty swear word (see it on X at www.snipca.com/49115).

With faces as red as its logo, DPD disabled part of the chatbot and said it will be updated to avoid future faults. See if it's on better form at www.snipca.com/49116.

Credit Ashley Beauchamp/X

LAPTOP | **£470** from Lenovo www.snipca.com/49046

Lenovo IdeaPad Slim 3i 15

Simple pleasures

It's been a while since we've reviewed a Windows laptop with a price as low as this. For less than £500 you get a 15.6in screen, an Intel Core i3-1315U processor and 8GB of RAM. It certainly has enough in the tank to run Windows at a reasonable rate of knots, but there are – not surprisingly – compromises.

> "A budget laptop that handles basic tasks well and offers upgrade options for those who want more"

The build is good quality, as you'd expect from a brand such as Lenovo, but it's nothing that stands out from the crowd – the lid is aluminium while the base is plastic.

The screen is relatively lacklustre, offering a maximum brightness level of 250cd/m². This makes it fine for indoors, but you won't want to use it outside on a sunny day. Colour-wise it manages a measly 60.5 per cent of the sRGB colour standard. That's too low for serious photo editors, but won't matter if you're spending most of your time just handling emails or browsing the web.

If you use our link above to buy this PC, you'll see that you can tweak its specification. If you're planning to work on the IdeaPad Slim outside you could upgrade the screen to a 300cd/m² panel for an extra £10. It's not a huge increase and it won't do much to improve colour accuracy, but it might be worth it if you need the extra brightness.

Our review unit also came with a 256GB SSD, which is acceptable, but a little on the small side if you're planning to install plenty of programs. If that's the case, you should consider the 512GB option for an extra £50.

The 6-core i3-1315U processor sits at the more basic end of Intel's 13th-generation processors, but with 8GB of RAM to help it out, it's fine for running general Windows tasks, checking email, streaming movies and browsing the web.

We tested it with 20 Chrome tabs open running a variety of websites and tools, and it managed absolutely fine. Gaming performance was disappointing, however, with even a fairly undemanding game such as Civilisation VI running at a disappointing 17 frames per second.

On the plus side, the decent 720p webcam comes with a privacy shutter. And while there's nothing particularly remarkable about the keyboard, it's pleasant enough to type on. The trackpad also works well, though it's positioned too far to the left for our liking. The sound quality of the built-in speakers isn't great for music, but that's usually the case in a budget laptop.

The battery life is surprisingly decent, lasting just over nine hours in our continuous-browsing tests. We have one gripe though – it continued to lose charge even when it was in sleep mode with the lid closed. You can get around this by ensuring you shut Windows down when you've finished, but it's an unnecessary inconvenience.

SPECIFICATIONS

6-core Intel Core i3-131315H processor • 8GB RAM • Intel Iris Xe graphics • 15.6in 1920x1080-pixel TN display • 256GB SSD • 720p webcam • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.1 • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • SD card reader • Windows 11 Home • 17.9x359x236mm (HxWxD) • 1.6kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49046

VERDICT A decent Windows laptop for the price, as long as you don't venture above and beyond basic Windows tasks

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE Honor MagicBook X 16 2023 £700
Its slightly larger screen and faster processor make this worth paying a bit more for

MINI PC | **£353** from GMKtec www.snipca.com/49068

GMKtec NucBox M4

Generation Ex

We did a double-take when we first looked at the specification of this machine – a PC with an Intel Core i9 processor for just £354? Take a closer look, however, and you'll note that it's an i9-11900H. That's an 11th-generation chip, three stages behind the very latest 14th-generation units.

Our review model was kitted out with 16GB of RAM and a 512GB SSD. By changing the components on GMKtec's website you can also opt for a barebones model without RAM or storage (£299) or improve things with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD (£393). The latter is probably worth the extra £40, but it wasn't the version we were sent for review so we weren't able to test it.

It's instructive to see how this configuration, with its older Core i9 processor, compares with PCs containing more modern components. The i9-11900H chip has eight cores, while the Core i5-13500H – a 13th-generation processor found in the £393 Chuwi CoreBox 5th (reviewed in Issue 674) – has 12 cores.

When pushed to its limits, an individual performance core in the i9 runs 28-per-cent faster than one in the newer i5. However, test the cores as a whole, and the CoreBox is 60-per-cent quicker.

This is reflected in Windows performance benchmark tests, which measure the CoreBox as 28-per-cent faster than the NucBox.

> "Low-cost mini PC that compromises on performance"

The difference becomes more pronounced if you carry out graphic work or games, because the graphics hardware in processors has improved significantly in the past few generations. We still wouldn't recommend a mini PC for gaming, but it's an absolute no-go on the NucBox M4.

Spend more and you'll get more bang for your buck. Our current favourite mini PC, the Minisforum UM780XTX (see page 32), may be just over twice the price at £729, but it's also twice as fast in processor benchmarks, and well over four times faster in graphics tests.

What we like about the NucBox M4 is its case. It has a larger footprint (when laid flat), and looks more like a classic desktop PC – the kind you used to have on your desk with the monitor sitting on top. However, it will also stand vertically (pictured left) if you prefer.

It's well equipped with ports, with one USB-C and two USB 3.0 on the front. On the back there's four more USB 3.0, two Ethernet sockets, an HDMI port and a DisplayPort.

SPECIFICATIONS

8-core Intel Core i9-11900H processor • 16GB RAM • Intel UHD graphics • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x Gigabit Ethernet ports • 1x USB-C port • 6x USB 3.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • Windows 11 Home • 36x180x175mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49068

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

Computer active BUY IT! ★★★★★ We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★ Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT An interesting take on the standard mini PC design, but while its older processor helps keep the price down, its performance is left behind by current models

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE Minisforum Tiger UM780XTX £729 Twice the price, but more than twice the performance, especially if you're likely to run demanding graphics software

LAPTOP | **£1,300** from Acer www.snipca.com/49073

Acer Swift Go 14

Quick silver

This is the first laptop we've tested that comes with one of Intel's new Ultra processors – in this case the Intel Core Ultra 7 155H. This is a new mobile processor, designed for laptops and mini PCs, which has Intel's Arc graphics hardware built in.

It's the first processor to fall outside Intel's usual generation-numbering system, effectively running alongside the current 14th-generation Core i5, i7 and i9 chips, which are designed to run desktop PCs and high-end laptops. The Ultra range, on the other hand, is intended for devices that use less power. It's a confusing business, but it's something we're all going to have to get used to.

> "The fastest laptop we've ever tested has a classy build and razor-sharp screen"

The big question is: how does it perform? The short answer is the Swift Go 14 is the fastest laptop we've tested to date. That honour was previously held by the Huawei MateBook 16s (£1,300, reviewed in Issue 669), but this has knocked it off its perch to become our new favourite laptop (see page 30).

When testing raw speed, the new Core Ultra processor runs 11-per-cent faster than the MateBook 16s. That's not a huge leap but it's still worth having, given there's no difference in price. In Windows it's blisteringly fast, swiftly handling every task we threw at it.

The built-in Intel Arc graphics hardware is also a step up from the Iris Xe in the Core i9. In graphics benchmark tests the Swift Go ran 56-per-cent quicker, which is a significant improvement. We still wouldn't recommend it to serious gamers, who should always opt for a machine with a separate graphics card, but casual gamers will find this runs well enough.

Our only complaint is the screen size, though the Swift Go's 14in panel is only inferior in terms of its dimensions. It actually has a higher resolution (2880x1800 pixels) than the MateBook, so it looks razor sharp. Its OLED technology provides perfect contrast, and its colours are vivid and reproduced accurately. In our tests we reached a brightness level of 374cd/m² and were able to recreate 79 per cent of the DCI-P3 colour standard.

The MateBook has a 16in screen which is great if you crave more immersion in games or movies, or want to see more data on your spreadsheets.

Audio is also impressive, with plenty of differentiation between low, mid and high frequencies. It doesn't have the volume levels of standalone speakers, but you can't expect to fill a room from such a small laptop. The built-in microphones did a grand job of picking up our voice in a video call, and the 2560x1440-pixel resolution webcam worked well even in relatively low light.

The battery life is marginally better than the MateBook's, with the smaller screen size making up for the extra power needed to run its OLED screen. It lasted nine hours 50 minutes in our continuous-browsing test.

The Swift Go also looks classy. It has an aluminium chassis that feels sturdy and robust. Open the lid and you'll see a large centred touchpad and chicklet-style backlit keyboard.

The touchpad handled all the Windows 11 gestures we tried with aplomb, including two-finger scrolling and pinch-to-zoom. The keyboard is also excellent, offering a responsive feel with a jaunty bounce. The backlighting is bright, and the spacing between keys is perfect.

On the left-hand edge it has a microSD card slot, audio jack socket and a USB 3.0 port. On the right edge you'll find a second USB 3.0, one HDMI and two USB-C ports, which handle both screen output and charging.

SPECIFICATIONS

16-core Intel Core Ultra 7 155H processor • 32GB RAM • 14in 2880x1800-pixel resolution OLED touchscreen • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.3 • 2x USB-C ports • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Windows 11 Home • 17.2x313x218mm (HxWxD) • 1.3kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49073

VERDICT This exceptional laptop is built around an impressive new processor from Intel, which outperforms our previous favourite laptop for the same price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Honor MagicBook X 16 £700

Not as powerful but cheaper and provides a larger screen

PRINTER | **£204** from Printerland www.snipca.com/49121

HP OfficeJet Pro 9012e

Fine print

If HP's OfficeJet 9012e looks familiar, it's because a lot of the company's inkjet printers now have a near-identical design, with the same boxy dimensions and grey/white colour scheme. There are differences if you delve into the specifications, however.

At its base there's a 250-sheet paper cassette, while on top HP has placed a 35-sheet document feeder for the scanner. In fact this versatile machine can print, scan, copy and even fax – all controlled via a 6.9cm colour touchscreen that's offset slightly to the left-hand side of the front panel and very easy to use.

> "A speedy multi-tasking machine, but struggles with snaps"

During installation the printer lets you sign up to HP+ (which is free) and HP's Instant Ink subscription service. HP+ requires you to keep your printer connected to the internet so HP can keep an eye on it, but provides automated updates, cloud-based printing from the smartphone app, an additional year's warranty and six months of free ink in return. Opt out and you can still get two years' cover with an online registration. As for Instant Ink, note that HP has just increased the price to £1.49 a month (Light plan) and £3.99 (Occasional).

If you choose the third option of simply buying replacement cartridges when they run out, it'll cost 1p per mono page or 4.2p colour, which is pretty good for a cartridge-based inkjet. To get similar value out of the subscription service you'd need to be printing 300 pages a month (and mostly in colour), which would be a stretch for most of us.

The printer takes its time to get started on multi-page print jobs, but is fairly nifty once it does. It managed 21.1 pages per minute (ppm) of black text, and 6.9ppm of colour graphics. It's relatively slow when printing double-sided, though – dropping to 3.4ppm for colour graphics.

It doesn't hang around when copying, with mono pages taking nine seconds and colour 10 seconds. It rattled off 10 mono copies in 71 seconds, and took 79 seconds for colour. Copying 10 colour sheets on both sides took five minutes, however.

The printer isn't great at reproducing photos, with its pigment inks drying to a dull, semi-matte finish. We were also disappointed with its slightly dark and dingy photocopies. Otherwise, it's hard to fault, particularly on typical office jobs such as text and colour graphics.

SPECIFICATIONS

4-in-1 printer, copier, scanner and fax • Two-cartridge system • 250-sheet paper capacity • 4800x1200dpi print quality • 1200x1200dpi scan quality • USB, Wi-Fi or Ethernet connection • 278x439x343mm • 9.3kg • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/49121

VERDICT Not as cheap to run as an ink-tank printer, but much faster if you need your prints in a hurry

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-2830 £230 More expensive to buy, but significantly cheaper to run – each print costing a fraction of a penny

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

VESA

What does it do?

VESA stands for Video Electronics Standards Association (www.vesa.org), and is a non-profit organisation responsible for standards relating to TVs and monitors, including the DisplayPort standard. However, it's probably best known for ensuring the same specifications are used for mounting monitors and TVs on to walls and stands.

How does it work?

On the back panel of many TVs and monitors, you'll find a series of holes into which you can screw a metal plate, such as the Amazon Basics Fixed Flat TV Wall Mount (£9 from Amazon at www.snipca.com/49123, pictured), that can be attached to a wall or monitor stand. You need to make sure that the plate you're using for your TV or monitor is capable of holding its weight.

Mini PCs often come with VESA mounts that let you attach them to the back of your monitor so they're hidden out of sight.

What are the specs?

The VESA specification is actually very simple and relates to the size of screw required, as well as the horizontal and vertical distance between the screw holes. However, there are several versions of the standard with different arrangements and distances between the holes, because larger TV screens require more support than small monitors. The smallest standard is currently 75x75mm, while the largest is 800x400mm. Many mounts can cater for more than one standard, but always check that a mount is compatible with your device before before buying one.

Can I change it later?

No. The VESA mount on a monitor or TV is built into its chassis to ensure it's strong enough to hold its own weight, so it isn't something you can change.

PHONE | **£570** from Amazon www.snipca.com/49098

Samsung Galaxy S23 FE

Down to earth

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

The Samsung Galaxy S23 FE is a cheaper, more basic version of the standard Galaxy S23 (www.snipca.com/45374, reviewed in Issue 654), though the latter's price has now dropped to £699 following the release of the £799 S24 at the end of January. If the S23 FE's price of £570 still seems expensive, you may want to consider the next model down, which is the Galaxy A54 (£499 from www.snipca.com/49099). The question is – do we really need another phone priced between the A54 and S23?

While it looks similar in many ways, the S23 FE is bigger than the S23, which makes it harder to hold. It's heavier too – 209g compared with 168g. The camera lenses protrude further from the back of the phone, so the whole thing wobbles if you try to use it lying on its back.

The screen is an AMOLED panel with a resolution of 1080x2340 pixels. Its refresh rate operates from 60 to 120Hz, depending on what's happening onscreen. It's bright enough to be used outdoors on a sunny day, but isn't as impressive as the S23's screen.

Like other S23 phones, it offers three decent cameras, including an ultrawide lens and a 3x telephoto lens. The latter doesn't capture as many megapixels as the S23's version but it's unusual for a mid-range phone to offer a telephoto option at all.

Overall, though, it takes superb pictures with vibrant colours, and most test shots came out richer and more vivid than the same scenes shot on our current favourite Android phone, the Google Pixel 7a (£399 from www.snipca.com/46332 – see page 30).

The S23 FE falls behind the 7a when it comes to low-light photography, however, struggling to pick up detail in murky areas.

As for performance, the S23 FE pulls away from the Pixel 7a and Galaxy A54, but not by enough to justify its higher price. It currently runs Samsung's One UI OS (based on Android 13), but an update to Android 14 is imminent, with a further three major updates guaranteed. The 4,500mAh battery easily lasts a full day and might even get you to lunchtime the day after. It's not fast at charging, though.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Exynos 2200 processor • 8GB RAM • 128 or 256GB storage • 6.4in 120Hz 2340x1080-pixel AMOLED screen • 50-megapixel rear camera • 10-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Samsung One UI (based on Android 13) • 158x77x8.2mm (HxWxD) • 209g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49098

VERDICT Has a decent screen, long battery life and takes great photos – though it's not especially good value

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE

Google Pixel 7a

£399 Significantly cheaper, if you don't mind sacrificing the telephoto lens

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Which photo scanner would you recommend?

Q I am wanting to buy a standalone photo scanner that I can use to digitise photo prints and transfer them to my PC. It will be for non-professional use at home, so I'm not looking for anything too expensive or advanced.

I'm considering either the Epson Perfection V39II or the Canon CanoScan LiDE 400. Which model would you recommend?

Sheila Besent

A We think either scanner would suit your needs. The Epson Perfection V39II costs £120 (www.snipca.com/49101) and the CanoScan is £75 (www.snipca.com/49102, pictured).

Both models have the same optical resolution of 4800x4800dpi, but the quoted speed for the CanoScan is slightly faster, meaning you'd spend less time waiting for your scans.

Both devices connect to a PC via a basic USB 2.0 cable and don't require any additional power source. This makes the scanners easy to get out and pack away again as and when you need them. On that basis, we'd opt for the CanoScan, simply because it's slightly cheaper.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Now's the time to tackle your smartphone

Are you missing out on everything you could do with it? With these helpful books, there's nothing to fear about using smartphones.

Find out more...

Modern phones can be baffling, but there's a solution...

Modern mobile phones (smartphones as they're called) can do so much more than just make phone calls – from browsing the web wherever you are, to checking train times, to acting as a sat-nav...

And best of all they can make it so easy to keep in touch with family and friends – in so many ways, from sharing photos to making video calls.

But using them isn't always as easy as you'd want – and that's putting it mildly!

Do the manufacturers do it on purpose?

Sometimes it can seem like the manufacturers deliberately make them complicated. It can drive you absolutely bonkers.

Whether you have problems with the basics or you're trying to do something slightly more advanced, it can be easy to use them... once you know how. But until you've been shown, it can be like talking a different language.

That's why we've published these books: *iPhones One Step at a Time*, *Android Phones One Step at a Time* and *Doro Smartphones One Step at a Time*.

Plain English... and that's not all

They explain how to use the phone, in plain simple language with pictures of the screen showing you exactly where to tap or slide your fingers. No jargon!

What's covered?

I can't list it all here. But amongst other things, you'll discover:

- The basics of controlling it – swiping, tapping, opening apps & so on.
- How to use it as a sat-nav... in the car or even on foot.
- Send emails from your phone.
- Instant messaging and how to use it.
- Most phones have a good camera built in – here's how to use it properly.
- Share photos with friends around the world – quickly and easily.
- Video phone calls – a great way to keep up with family who live a long way away.

And obviously, you can make phone calls and send and receive text messages. ("Voicemail" is covered, too). All explained nice and simply. (Find out more in the free infopack – read on...)

What one reader had to say:

"Thanks for a fantastic smart phone book. Very pleasant staff as usual.

I think this book should be sold with every smart phone. I have learnt so much from it, the info you get with the phone is non-existent.

Smart phones are quite complex, and your books speak in plain English."

Only half the story

That's only half the story, but I don't have room to explain here. I've put together full information on the books – who they're for, what they cover and so on. What's more, the books also come with a free gift – no room to explain that here either.

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SMARTWATCH | **£69** from Amazon www.snipca.com/49078

CMF Watch Pro

Face time

CMF is an offshoot brand of Nothing, the British company that brought us the Nothing Phone (reviewed in Issue 639). CMF makes accessories that are compatible with all devices, not just those made by Nothing, including earbuds, a phone charging block, and now this smartwatch.

This budget model is more in line with cheaper Fitbit-style offerings than Apple, Google or Samsung watches. However, it looks looks great on the wrist, while the materials used and finish around the face are very classy.

Most of its advanced features – including notifications from apps – require a smartphone connected via Bluetooth.

There's no app store, meaning you're limited to just the apps that come installed. Most of the basics are present and correct, including timers, alarms, music controls, fitness tracking, camera remote control and the ability to make phone calls. When you open the Exercise app, you'll find a comprehensive list of 110 different activities to choose from, and it tracks the usual heart rate and health metrics.

The screen is large, sharp and bright, and it's very responsive to the touch. There are broad bezels around the edge of the face and these help to neatly frame the circular user interface.

Our biggest gripe is that the watch lacks an ambient light sensor. This means the screen is often too bright or too dim for the lighting conditions. It only takes a couple of taps to adjust, but it's a hassle that you won't experience with more expensive watches.

SPECIFICATIONS
AMOLED 410x502-pixel resolution screen • Aluminium alloy case • Built-in GPS • IP68 • Bluetooth 5.3 • 13-day battery life • 47x40x12.9mm • 47g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49078

VERDICT A relatively cheap and attractive smartwatch, but it lacks handy functions found on more expensive rivals

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE Fitbit Charge 6 £140 More expensive but a smaller, less chunky watch that also tracks your health and works smoothly with smartphones

SECURITY CAMERA | **£50** from Ezviz www.snipca.com/49077

Ezviz H3C

Wired for vision

The latest security camera from Ezviz is an affordable waterproof outdoor model that connects to your network and records footage in 2K resolution.

One reason, perhaps, for its low price is that you'll need to connect it to a standard plug socket via a cable, meaning it doesn't come with a battery. To install it you'll need to drill a hole through the wall you want to attach it to, so you can feed the wire through. It's not the neatest of systems, but means you have the option of connecting it to your network via either an Ethernet cable or Wi-Fi.

Once installed, however, the H3C runs very smoothly. Setup via the mobile app is fairly straightforward and the camera has a microSD card slot for storing footage if you don't want to pay extra to store it online.

The camera records video at a resolution of 2304x1296 pixels, but it isn't the best quality we've seen. You can make out what's going on, but you might not have enough detail to pick up the registration of a passing vehicle, for example. The night vision is similar – fine, but hardly crystal clear.

The app isn't the easiest to use but you'll learn your way around it. The more advanced features, like human detection, can occasionally be hit and miss. However, the camera generally does a decent job of pinging your phone whenever motion is detected, which is what most people will be looking for.

SPECIFICATIONS
3-megapixel camera with 2304x1296-pixel resolution • 30fps • 82-degree horizontal and 98-degree vertical field of view • 30m night vision • Wi-Fi 4 or Ethernet • Supports microSD cards up to 512GB • 72x72x157mm (HxWxD) • 330g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/49077

VERDICT The lack of a battery makes installation tricky, but it's an affordable option that works well if you're on a limited budget

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE Ring Outdoor Camera Pro Battery £160 Installation is simpler with this battery-powered camera, but it adds to the price

SMART TV | From **£229** from Argos www.snipca.com/49139

Hisense 43A6KTUK

Set fair

This 43in smart TV may not offer OLED screen technology, but it is currently one of the cheapest 4K TVs you can buy.

Chinese manufacturer Hisense has a reputation for keeping prices low, but with this model it's managed to avoid cutting too many corners. The bezels around the screen are stylishly thin at the top and sides, though slightly wider on the bottom edge. At 74mm at its deepest (as pictured below) the whole thing is fairly chunky, however, which makes it better suited to sitting on a TV stand than being mounted on a wall.

> "Incredibly cheap for a 4K TV set, and has all the streaming services you'll want"

The screen is a VA LCD panel illuminated by LEDs that sit directly behind the screen rather than around its edges. This results in better contrast than an IPS screen, but it lacks that technology's wide viewing angles, so is better suited to a household with only one or two viewers.

Image quality is surprisingly good for such a budget set. The superior contrast means dark scenes retain a satisfying amount of detail. Colour reproduction is accurate, with nature scenes and skin tones rendered realistically.

This is helped by Hisense's AI Picture Optimization technology, which tries to achieve the best look for each image frame the TV receives – especially when it comes to the tricky business of upscaling HD content to the TV's 4K resolution.

Impressively, the TV supports three of the four main HDR formats: HDR10, HLG and Dolby Vision – the latter carries extra scene-by-scene picture data to help deliver more dynamic and balanced results.

Finally, Hisense's VIDAA smart TV system isn't the slickest interface, but it works fine and delivers the streaming services most people will want. This includes Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV and the catch-up services for all the UK terrestrial broadcasters, delivered within the helpful Freeview Play app. There's also support for Apple AirPlay and Google Home devices.

SPECIFICATIONS
4K 3840x2160-pixel resolution • 43in VA screen • Supports HDR10, HLG & Dolby Vision • 3x HDMI ports • 2x USB ports • 1x Ethernet port • 560x960x74mm (HxWxD) • 6.9kg • Two-year warranty
www.snipca.com/49139

VERDICT An impressive TV for the price, though its viewing angles are limited and it has a chunky design

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE TCL 55RP630K £319
A more expensive 55in TV that comes with Roku's excellent smart TV software built in

DO I REALLY NEED...

Wireless PC speakers?

What are they?

The LSX II LT (pictured) from British manufacturer KEF (https://uk.kef.com) are a pair of high-quality Hi-Fi speakers, capable of playing music wirelessly via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth from your PC and TV.

What do they do?

They can connect to your music collection via your network if you store it on your PC or NAS drive. Alternatively, it can stream from phones and tablets using Bluetooth, or use its own built-in apps to connect via Wi-Fi to streaming services, including Spotify and Tidal.

What's the catch?

Although it's called a wireless speaker system, you still need to plug one unit into a power socket, and the two speakers are connected by wire so they can pass on power and operate in stereo. The other catch is the price – £899.

So can I do without it?

Yes. The speakers look and sound great but that price is hardly music to our ears.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 28 Feb

HP Pavilion Plus 14 OLED
Powerful new laptop with a Ryzen 7 processor and 14in OLED screen

Acemagic S1 Mini PC
A mini PC with a handy info screen that monitors how well it's running

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

NEW ENTRY

Acer Swift Go 14
£1,300 from www.snipca.com/49073
Tested Issue 677

Powered by one of Intel's new Ultra processors, this is the fastest laptop we've ever seen – even beating the still-impressive Huawei MateBook 16s. However, at 14 inches, its screen is two inches smaller.

ALTERNATIVE Honor MagicBook X 16 2023 Has a 16in screen and is good value, though nowhere near as fast. £700 from www.snipca.com/47868

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 1TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £644 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.2in
£319 from www.snipca.com/48634
Tested Issue 623

The 9th-generation of the basic iPad, released in 2021, is now the best-value Apple tablet. The 2022 version looks better and has a faster processor, but it's not worth paying £130 extra for.

ALTERNATIVE iPad Mini With an even better, but smaller, screen than the 10.2in iPad, the Mini also supports the Pencil and has 64GB of storage. £569 from www.snipca.com/33050

ANDROID TABLET

Samsung Galaxy Tab S9
£679 from www.snipca.com/49029
Tested Issue 667

With a much brighter screen than our previous favourite – the Galaxy Tab S8 – this is perfect for watching TV. It also has a faster processor, so tasks feel smoother, even with several windows open. £679 will get you the 128GB version. If you want 256GB you'll need to spend £100 more.

ALTERNATIVE Lenovo Tab P11 Pro It's slower than the Tab S9 and the screen is duller, but has a detachable keyboard so you can use it as a laptop. £430 from www.snipca.com/45244

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 13
£599 from www.snipca.com/43498
Tested Issue 627

Now £200 cheaper than its 2021 launch price, the iPhone 13 has a superb screen, long battery life and an excellent camera – particularly for taking quick snaps without blurring. You could pay £799 for the newer iPhone 15, but we're not convinced it's worth the extra money.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone SE With a single camera and smaller screen but the same powerful A15 processor and 64GB storage as the iPhone 14, it's great value. £429 from www.snipca.com/34773

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 7a
£399 from www.snipca.com/46332
Tested Issue 660

A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Xiaomi Poco F3 This remains an excellent phone, with 6GB RAM and 128GB storage. The only phone under £450 that's faster is the iPhone SE. £259 from www.snipca.com/44553

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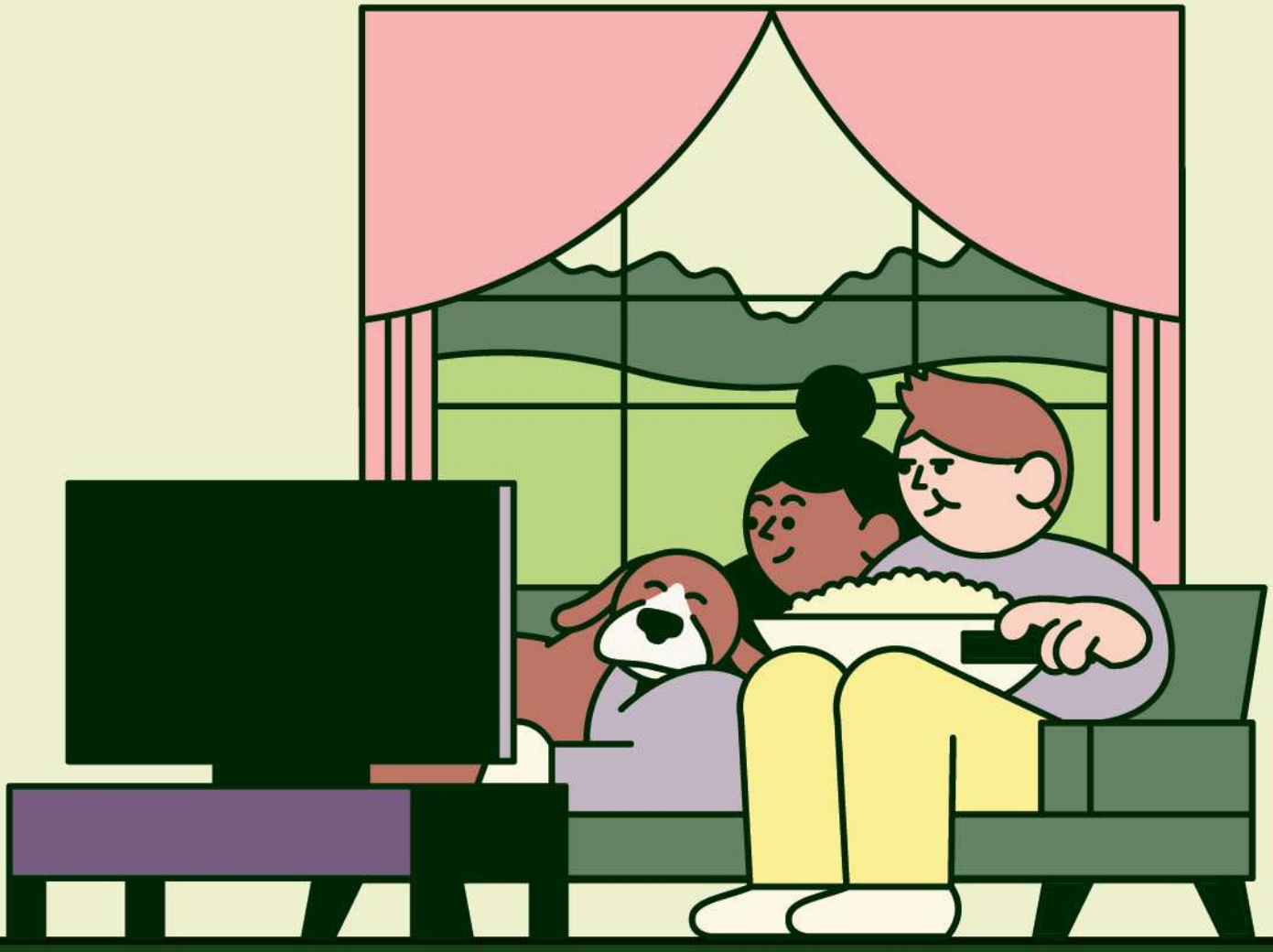

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

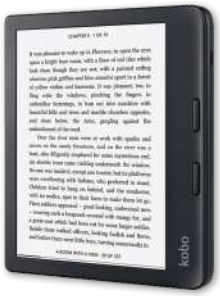
Minisforum UM780XTX
£729 from www.snipca.com/48917
Tested Issue 676

This powerful machine costs only £100 more than the Beelink SER6 Pro, but has twice the memory, twice the storage and a superior processor. These help it run PC tasks faster and handle graphics more smoothly. Ports include USB-C, USB 3.0, HDMI, DisplayPort and Gigabit Ethernet.

ALTERNATIVE Beelink SER6 Pro 7753HS Has 32GB RAM and a 500GB SSD for slick Windows performance. £629 from www.snipca.com/46416

EBOOK READER

Kobo Libra 2
£170 from www.snipca.com/40645
Tested Issue 624



A fantastic 7in screen, 32GB of storage and Bluetooth connectivity make this a rival to Amazon's Oasis ebook reader, yet it's much cheaper. Battery life is superb – we managed 54 hours of use per charge. It supports OverDrive, so you can borrow ebooks from libraries.

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Kindle This low-cost option is a good choice, especially now it has 16GB of storage. £85 from www.snipca.com/44221

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629

Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £29.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£72 from www.snipca.com/41104
Tested Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Anker PowerConf C300 Good image quality, crisp audio and lots of features. £70 from www.snipca.com/41105

PC MONITOR

Iiyama ProLite XU2492HSU-B1
£110 from www.snipca.com/49030
Tested Issue 618

This 23.8in screen is superb value, with a resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. Colour is good, covering 88 per cent of the sRGB colour range. Connect your computer via HDMI, DisplayPort or VGA, and there's a USB hub to plug in your mouse and keyboard.

ALTERNATIVE AOC 27P2C This also has a 1920x1080 resolution. It's 27 inches, so pixel density is lower, but you'll only notice if you look really closely. £208 from www.snipca.com/41609

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 500GB
£58 from www.snipca.com/41547
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £94; 2TB costs £170.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £45 from www.snipca.com/37304

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 3 Corel PaintShop Pro 2023

Winner of a Recommended Award in Issue 675 (page 26), Corel PaintShop Pro 2023 is an advanced photo editor with a range of professional editing and graphic-design tools, plus time-saving AI features.

It includes the new AfterShot Lab for easy RAW image editing, so you don't need to use any extra software to do the job. Also new is Focus Stacking, which blends multiple images of the same scene, taken at different focus distances, to create a final composite with a greater depth of field than any of the individual source images.

In addition, Corel PaintShop Pro 2023 has a new 'Snap to Objects feature'. Use the bounding box to precisely snap two objects together, avoiding extra steps in the editing process.

You can easily crop areas of your photo to alter the focus using composition guides, Golden Ratio and Rule of Thirds. Resize with ease using one of several presets, or resize by pixels, percentage or print size. Restore and repair old photos with the Scratch Remover and Fade Correction tools to enhance contrast and colour to faded photos.

Corel® PaintShop® Pro

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/49067 and submit your details. It runs until midnight Tuesday 27 February. Good luck!

You can buy **PaintShop Pro 2023** from Corel at www.snipca.com/48803. It costs £69.99 for a new purchase, or £49.99 if upgrading from the previous edition. For more information on PaintShop Pro 2023 and Corel's other software visit www.corel.com.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£230 from www.snipca.com/48962
Tested Issue 676

This replaces the ET-1810 as our favourite printer because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for only £80 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7.500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/43670

SMART TV

Samsung Q60B
£420 from www.snipca.com/45083
Tested Issue 652

With our former favourite – the TCL 55RP620K – out of stock, Samsung's 43in set is our new pick. It has excellent colour reproduction in well-lit scenes, and the picture is wonderfully sharp, especially in 4K.

ALTERNATIVE LG OLED42C3
LG's 42in TV is more than double the price, but unlike TCL's model it has an OLED screen, boosting picture quality considerably. £900 from www.snipca.com/47271

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800
£233 from www.snipca.com/47586
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £245 from www.snipca.com/49161

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Workshops & Tips

Pull Out & Keep
Issue 677

14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

35 Stream from your PC to your smart TV
38 Add subtitles to your videos
40 Readers' Tips
42 Browser Tips: Access Chrome's side-panel features individually

PLUS
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 In the Club: Add backgrounds to meetings

HOW TO...

Stream from your PC to your smart TV

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Jellyfin software **Time required:** 60 minutes

You've probably heard of Plex (www.plex.tv), the media-streaming server from which you can stream your music, films and TV series. It's easy to set up and many of its key features are free – but not all of them. You'll need a Plex Pass, which costs £3.99 a month, to unlock the full range of Plex settings and watch or record live TV. That's not expensive for all these features – and more – but if you prefer to use software that's completely free, there are alternatives.

The best one is Jellyfin. It doesn't have all the same features as Plex, but it does let you catalogue and manage your media collection. You can also use it to watch live TV and record broadcasts – and even use it to organise books, magazines and photos.

It uses the traditional server-client model, where 'server' software runs on a central computer – ideally an old PC – from which 'client' programs running on other computers, phones, tablets and smart TVs stream content. Because the content all lives on the server, there's no need to store it on every device on which it's played back.

Here we'll show you how to set up Jellyfin on a regular Windows PC, add content to its catalogue, and stream it to a smart TV.

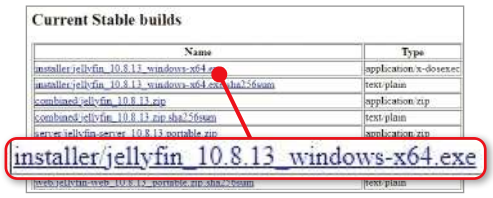
1 Install and set up Jellyfin

Visit www.jellyfin.org and click Downloads at the top of the page, followed by Server at the top left. The server software is available for several operating systems, so click Windows at the top middle of the page, then click the Downloads button in the 'Windows Official' box.

There are a number of 'builds' to choose from. At the time of writing, the one you want is the 'installer/jellyfin_10.8.13_windows-x64.exe' file, which appears at the top of the 'Current Stable builds' table (see screenshot). Click this to download the file.

When you launch Jellyfin it may trigger a warning from Microsoft Defender SmartScreen. Jellyfin is safe, so click 'More info', then 'Run anyway'. You may then see a User Access Control alert. Again, allow this to launch the program. Click through the instructions, keeping the default selections. When it's finished, return to your browser, open a new tab, and visit http://localhost:8096/.

Don't worry if that looks like a strange address. The localhost part points the browser at the web server running inside your own computer, while :8096/ is the port it should use to get there. A web server can open up multiple 'ports', with each one designed to use a particular service. Common ports include 80, which is used to serve web pages and 21 for file-transfer protocol (FTP) to load data like web pages and pictures on to a web server.



Click this link to download the latest version of Jellyfin

Having multiple ports on a single server is like having multiple doors in a cupboard. This would let you put all your jumpers behind one, coats behind another, and trousers behind a third. You'll know exactly which door to open for each kind of clothing, without having to go to the expense of buying multiple cupboards.

The same is true of a server: with

multiple ports, you can go straight to the port you need for the service you want, without having to buy multiple servers.

Some ports, like the ones we mentioned earlier, have become standard so that email clients, web browsers and so on know where to find the services they rely on. However, where a service uses a non-standard port, you may need to specifically direct the program accessing the service to the port it should be using, hence the :8096 at the end of the address you've just typed.

You'll now see more setup instructions. Select your preferred language and click Next, then provide a username and password, and again click Next. Ideally the username and password should be different to the one you use to access your PC – particularly if you plan on setting up a Jellyfin client on a shared device, like your smart TV. You can leave the password fields empty if you don't want to secure your library with a password.

Click Next, then click Add Media Library. Here, we're going to set up a music library. Click the 'Content type' menu and select Music, then click the '+' beside Folders and navigate to the Music library on your PC. This will be in your User folder, so click C:\, then Users, then your account name. Next, click Music, then OK.

If you already store your music on a server on your network rather than in your local Music folder, then instead of clicking through the folders as we described, click the 'Folder:' box at the top of the screen and type the folder name as it appears on the server (1 in our screenshot below).

Next, in the 'Shared network folder' box, type the address of your server – you'll find this by logging into your router and looking at the list of attached devices. In our screenshot it's \\10.0.0.50 2.

How I use Jellyfin

Having set up Jellyfin on a PC, I've decided to repeat the process on a Raspberry Pi using the DietPi operating system (www.dietpi.com). Because Raspberry Pi is a low-powered device, I can leave it turned on around the clock. It's already performing a range of duties on my home network, including blocking adverts on all my browsers and streaming a music collection to my smart speakers, so I don't need to add any new devices to my setup.

Nik Rawlinson

How would you use Jellyfin?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Finally, click OK.

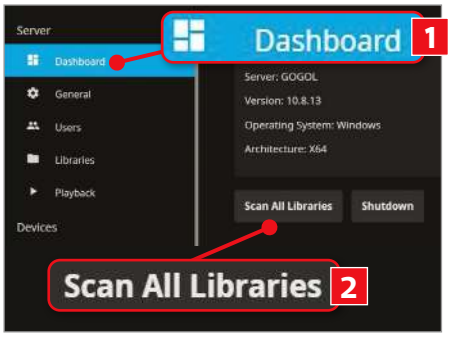
Whichever method you used – adding a folder on your computer or a network location – you'll now be back at the Add Media Library screen. Scroll through the rest of the page to make sure you're happy with the default settings for downloading album information and cover art from shared catalogues, then click OK.

Repeat the above process for any other libraries – such as videos and photos – you want to add. If you intend to access your server from a smart TV then you probably want to also add a Movies library at the very least.

Select your preferred language and country for details relating to your music and videos that are downloaded from online catalogues. This will index them so they appear in lists and search results.

On our system English is the default for the language, and United States the default country, so we used the dropdown menu to change the latter to United Kingdom before clicking Next, then again on the following page, followed by Finish.

This takes you to Jellyfin's dashboard. The program is now ready to use.

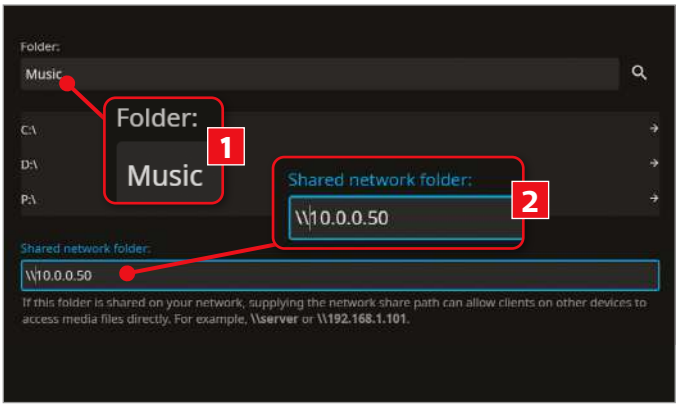


If Jellyfin doesn't automatically show new music and video, force it to rescan your libraries

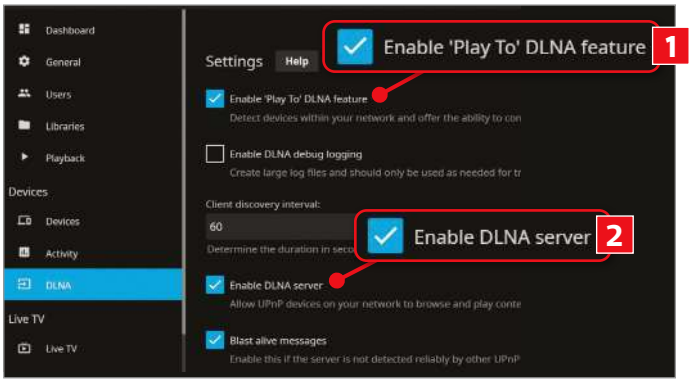
2 Turn on DLNA

Now type your username and password (if you created them when setting up), then click Sign In. Your home page should show the videos, music and other media that already exist in your libraries. Any more you add in future should also appear. If they don't, you can force Jellyfin to manually update its catalogue. Click the top-left menu, then click Dashboard (1 in our screenshot above), followed by Scan All Libraries 2.

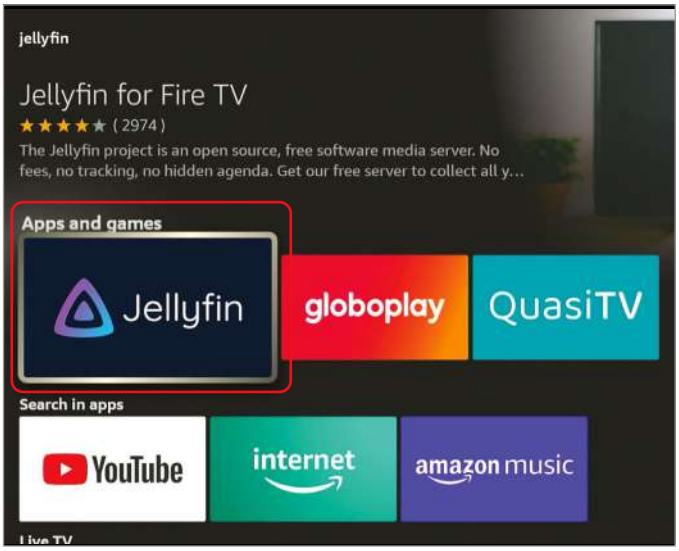
Before going any further, try turning on the streaming standard DLNA, which might make it easier to connect to your



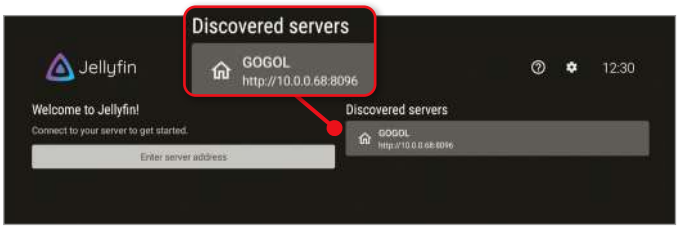
Tell Jellyfin where you are storing your media



Turn on Jellyfin's DLNA features to make it easier to connect from a smart TV



Look for Jellyfin in your smart TV or streaming stick's app store



If you've enabled DLNA your smart TV should already be able to see your Jellyfin server

Type the code shown on your TV screen to log into the same account that you're using on your PC

Jellyfin library from a remote device like a smart TV or streaming stick. Click DLNA in the Dashboard sidebar, then tick the boxes beside 'Enable 'Play To' DLNA feature' (1 in our screenshot below left) and 'Enable DLNA server' 2. Scroll to the bottom of the screen and click Save.

3 Install Jellyfin on your TV

Now, check your TV's app store for Jellyfin. If you are using Google TV with Chromecast or Amazon Fire TV, these each have a Jellyfin app – our screenshot above shows it on the latter. Install it, and launch it.

In the steps that follow, we will be setting up the service using Google Fire TV, but the instructions will be the same or similar on any device running the Jellyfin app.

When you first launch the app, it will look for a server on your network. If you enabled the DLNA features we recommended earlier, it should appear as it has on our screenshot top right. Select it using your TV remote control.

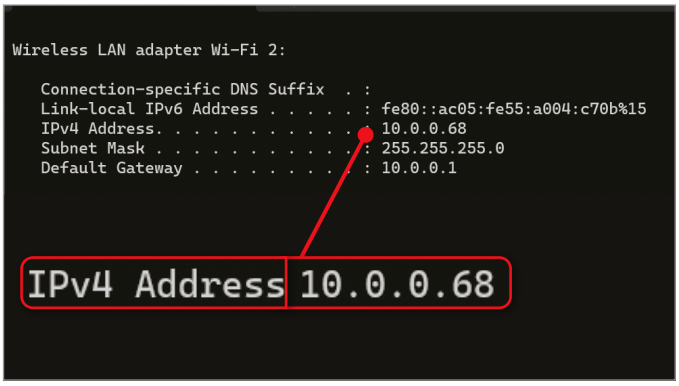
If you haven't enabled DLNA you'll need to manually enter the address of your server. Unfortunately, you can't use the same 'localhost' address you used on your PC as, in this instance, localhost would relate to your TV or streaming stick. So, open a new Command Prompt window on your PC, type ipconfig and press Enter. Look for the IPv4 Address – it's 10.0.0.68 on our network (see screenshot below left). Return to your TV, select the option to 'Enter server address', then use your TV remote to type the address, followed by the same :8096 port you used on your PC (see screenshot below right).

4 Log into Jellyfin on your TV

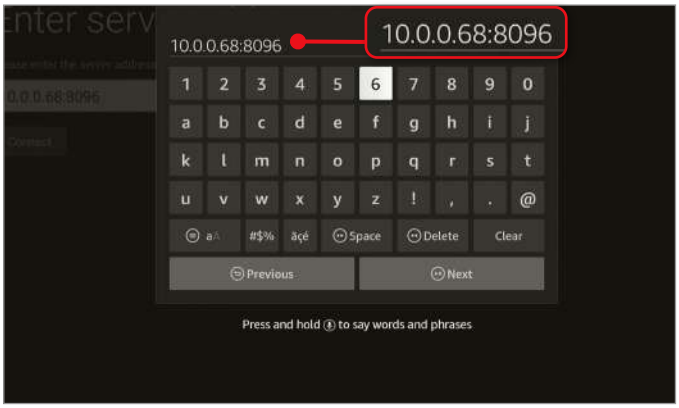
However you connect to the server, whether using DLNA or by manually entering the address, you'll next need to log in. Click 'Add account' and Jellyfin will show a six-digit code. Switch back to the browser-based Jellyfin server on your PC and click the top-right person icon. This opens the user menu. Click 'Quick Connect', then type the code that appeared on your TV (1 in our screenshot above) and click Authorise 2. If they match, your TV will be logged in to the same account as your PC.

Once you're logged in, you can browse your media using your remote control. The screenshot below shows us playing an album in our Music folder.

Once Jellyfin is set up and you're logged in, you can play your content using your TV's remote control



Use the ipconfig command to look up your computer's address on your home network...



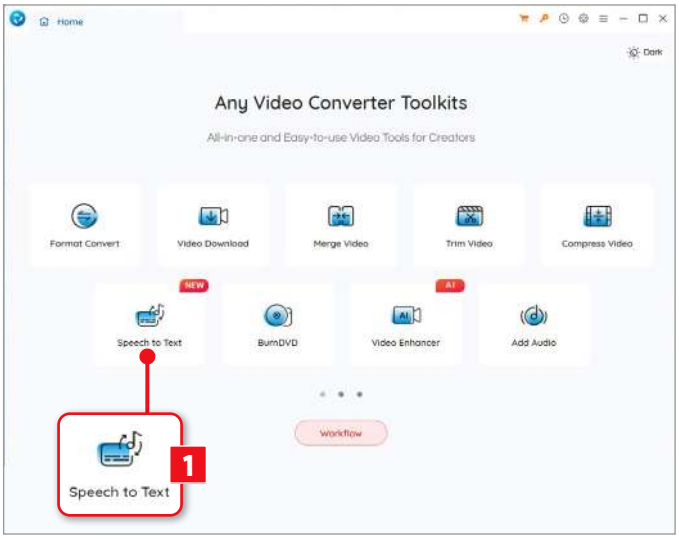
...then enter this on Jellyfin on your TV adding 8096

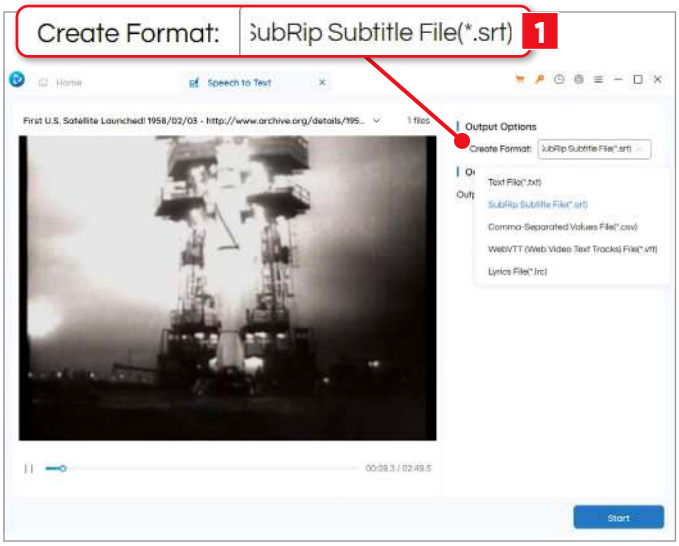
Add subtitles to your videos

What you need: Any Video Converter
Time required: 60 minutes

One of our favourite video tools, Any Video Converter, has just received an update that lets you add subtitles to any video by transcribing the audio track, then overlaying the text on the original file. That's what we're going to do here, using a video of the first US satellite launch in 1958.

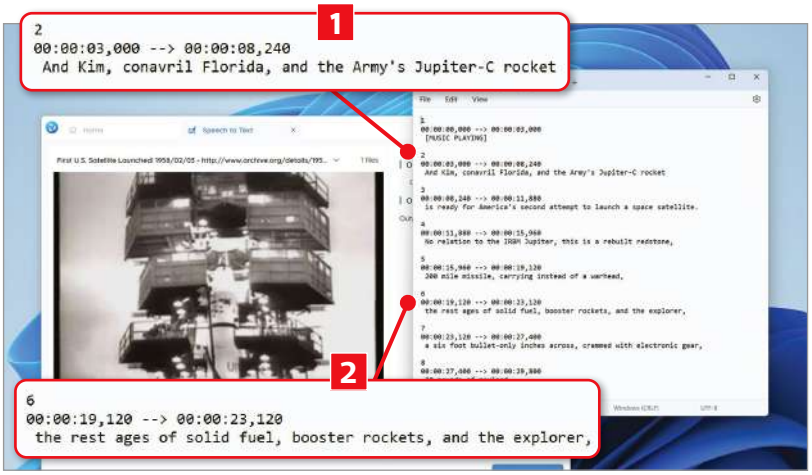
You can download Any Video Conveter for free from www.snipca.com/48883. If you want to follow our steps using the same video, you'll find it at the Internet Archive at www.snipca.com/49013. For more on the latest version of Any Video Converter (8.2.4), see Issue 675, page 18.



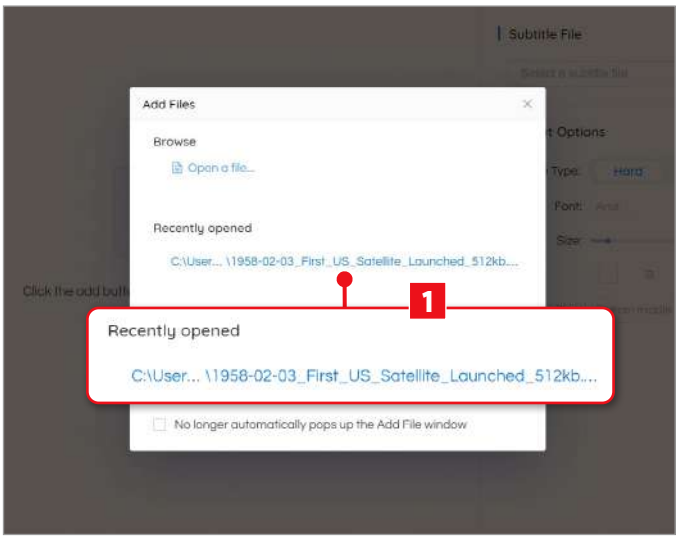


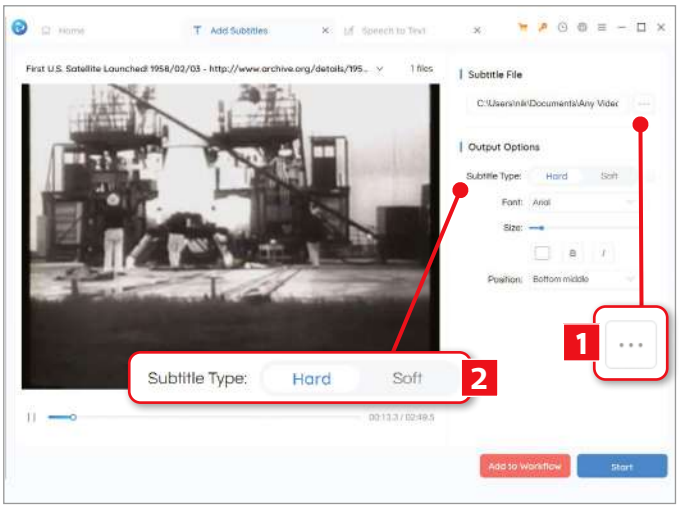
STEP 1 Launch Any Video Converter and click the 'Speech to Text' button **1**. This feature is new in version 8.2.4. Either drag your video into the program window, or click '+ Add Video' and select it using File Explorer. The video will open in the window and start playing. You don't need to worry about stopping or rewinding it, as the program generates the subtitles at high speed in the background rather than in real time as the video plays. This saves a lot of time.

STEP 2 Select which kind of subtitle file you want from the Create Format menu **1**. It's set to SubRip Subtitle File by default, and we'd recommend sticking with this as it's a widely recognised file type with timestamps for each piece of dialogue. If you specifically need a CSV File, WebVTT (for use on videos embedded in HTML5 web pages) or a Lyrics File (for dialogue in an MP3 file), those are also available here. Leave the two Output Setting menus at their default values, as any other option requires an upgrade to Pro ($79.95 one-off or $9.95 per month).



STEP 3 Click Start, and Any Video Converter will play your video at high speed in the background and compile a subtitle file. When it's finished, click 'View output file'. This opens the subtitle file's location in a File Explorer window. Open the file you've just created and read through it. You may find that the transcription has got some of the words wrong, as it has done here (**1** and **2**). If so, play the video again with the subtitle file open in Notepad, and compare the two, making corrections where necessary. Don't change any of the timestamps.

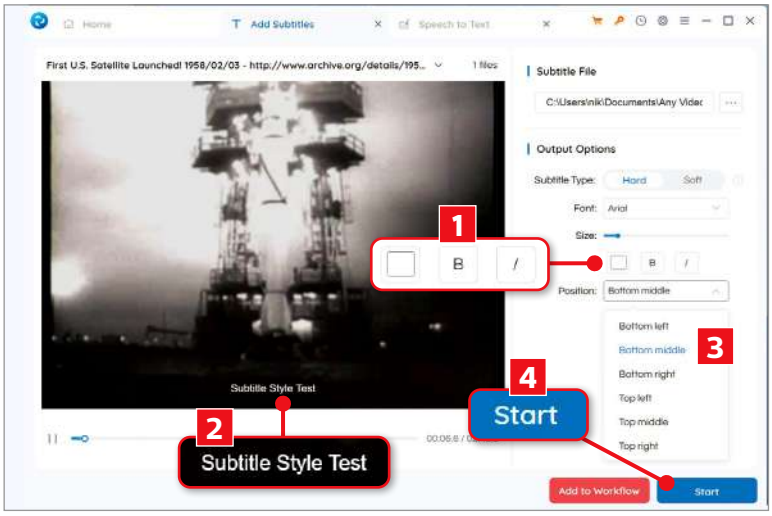




STEP 4 Now you need to combine your video and subtitles track. Return to Any Video Converter and close the 'Speech to Text completion' box. Select the Home tab, then click twice on the arrow that appears when you hover over the right-hand edge of the interface. When you see the Add Subtitles button, click it and an Add Files box will pop up, with your video already linked in the 'Recently opened' section **1**. Click it here to reopen it.

STEP 5 Click the three dots below Subtitle File **1**, and navigate to the transcript you just created. If the program doesn't automatically open the folder containing your file, click Documents in the sidebar, then Any Video Converter, followed by 'Speech to Text'. Select your file and click Open. The program can generate both 'hard' subtitles, which are burned into the video file, and 'soft' subtitles, which are a separate track that you can edit later. Leave 'Subtitle Type' set to Hard **2**.

STEP 6 Now it's time to format your subtitles. You can see a preview of how the subtitles will look on the video **1**. Use the font, size and emphasis controls to change their appearance **2**, and the Position menu **3** to move them to your preferred location on the screen. When you've made your adjustments, click Start **4** and the program will play your video at high speed in the background again, this time burning the subtitles into the video stream and using the timestamps in the subtitle file to make sure each line appears at the appropriate moment.



STEP 7 When Any Video Converter has finished combining the two files, it will return you to the familiar 'View output' box. Click 'View output file' to open the video in your default video player. You'll see that it now has text from your subtitle file burned into each frame **1**. If you spot any errors as you play the video, open your subtitle file in Notepad and make the necessary edits, then follow our instructions from Step 4 to create a new video.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Open folders with just one click

I've started using the Files app (www.snipca.com/49009) as an alternative to File Explorer after your review of the new version (3.1.1) in Issue 676 (page 18). Your instructions took me to the Behaviour section in Settings where I found a useful option that lets you open folders in just one click, rather than having to double-click.

First, you need to click the Settings cog in the top-right corner of the program, then select Folders on the left (1 in our screenshot). Now scroll down to the Behaviours section, as you explained, and look for the 'Opening items' dropdown menu. You now need to click the 'Open items with a single click' slider so it turns blue 2. There's no 'OK' button to confirm the change, so just click the top-right X to close the Settings box and return to Files.

I love how customisable Files is. I don't know who designed it, but Microsoft should snap them up and get them to revamp File Explorer for the next Windows version!

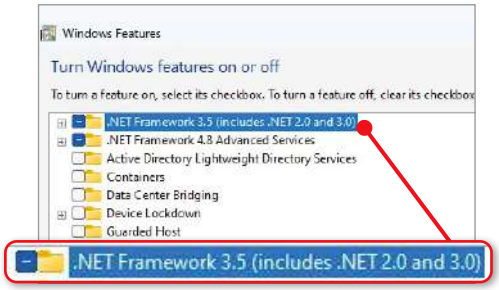
Ryan Edge

Ryan wins a copy of our 2022 Back Issue CD **Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/48860**

SOFTWARE

Install .NET 3.5 to run SyncToy in Windows 11

I read with interest your answer to Andrew Ball about using IDrive (www.idrive.com) as a replacement for the discontinued SyncToy (Issue 674, page 20). While IDrive is a good alternative for backup purposes, it didn't quite meet my requirements because I couldn't read the original file names in IDrive's backup folder.



I use SyncToy to keep up-to-date copies of important files on my Windows 10 laptop. If I have any problems with my PC, then I can continue working on my laptop without having lost any important files.

Although Microsoft discontinued SyncToy in 2021, you can still install it on your Windows 11 PC. But it requires installing the .NET framework, Version 2.0.50727.

This is easily done. Just search for 'Windows Features' in Windows search, then click Open. Now select the '.Net Framework 3.5 (Includes .NET 2.0 and .NET 3.0)' box (see screenshot left) and click OK at the bottom. It takes a while for the files to download, but once this has completed, SyncToy will install without any problem.

Ken Brown

SOFTWARE

Uninstall old Adobe programs to run Windows 11

I'd like to add some information in response to Harry Beard's question in Issue 674 ('Will old Office and Photoshop work in Windows 11?', page 68). I recently purchased a new barebones PC and installed Windows 11 Pro. I then installed several programs and repeatedly encountered problems which completely corrupted the operating system. After reinstalling Windows many times I finally identified Adobe Acrobat X (released in 2010) and Adobe Photoshop CS6 (released in 2012) as the problem.

Why I stopped using...

Apple's Podcasts app

Last October, my favourite podcasts stopped downloading through Apple's Podcasts app. I tried loads of fixes, such as reinstalling the app and resubscribing to the podcasts, but nothing worked.

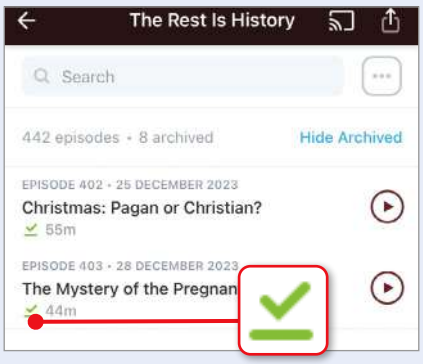
And what I use instead...

In the end I gave up and looked for a free alternative. I settled on **Pocket Casts** (https://pocketcasts.com), which does the simple job of letting you download and play podcasts for free.

That's not to say it's easy to use. I still haven't worked out the best way to view downloaded episodes. I just click the podcast title and scroll down, looking for the green tick to indicate it's ready to play (see screenshot).

There are lots of paid-for features if you want to subscribe. The Plus edition gives you folders to store podcasts, and bookmarks to save favourite sections of episodes. Those sound useful for podcast connoisseurs, but I'm happy just playing an episode for free, then deleting it.

Edward Dunn



Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Neither of these programs are supported for Windows 11. They seemed to corrupt the system, forcing me to reinstall it. I may have been unlucky, but it's definitely worth researching online before making the decision to upgrade.

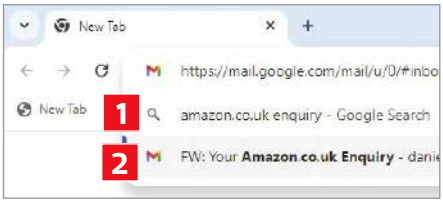
Graham Gardener

EMAIL

Search Gmail emails in Chrome's address bar

I noticed recently purely by chance that some emails you've received in Gmail appear when you search in Chrome's address bar. I find this a handy way of clicking straight to the email in question, without having to open Gmail.

You have to be signed into your Google account for this to work. As an example, I was recently researching information online about a complaint I was making to Amazon. I wanted to quickly check a detail in an email related to the case, so I typed amazon.co.uk enquiry into Chrome's address bar (1 in our screenshot below) and it suggested the email I was looking for 2. Clicking this opened the email.



As far as I can see, it searches the subject line of emails. It also works with the names of senders. But it doesn't seem to work with some sensitive emails, such as bank statements. I guess this is a sensible privacy precaution.

Helen Flanagan

GENEALOGY

Search questionnaires of Far East PoWs

Thanks for Judith Batchelor's very helpful advice on finding Prisoner of War records in Issue 673's Grow Your Family Tree (page 16). In the case of PoWs captured in the Far East, readers may like to know that a fairly comprehensive copy of their Liberation Questionnaires (see screenshot below left) has also been published by the 'Children Of Far East Prisoners Of War' association. These can be accessed at www.cofepow.org.uk.

Michael Clemitson

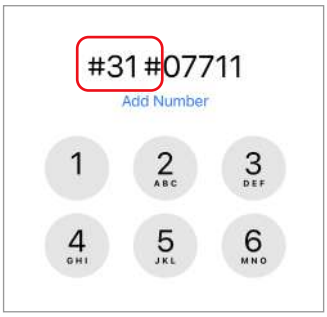
PHONES

Hide your number when you phone someone

Your tip on typing *#*#4636#*#* to reveal a phone's battery information reminded me of another useful IMEI code you can type – #31#. If you type this before the number when you phone someone (see screenshot below), they can't see that it's you calling. Instead their screen will show No Caller ID.

You can of course turn off Caller ID completely by opening Settings, then tapping Phone, followed by Show My Caller ID and moving the slider so it's no longer green. But that's an all-or-nothing approach that doesn't work for me. When I phone my elderly relatives, for example, I want them to know it's me calling, not a scammer. Therefore I type #31# usually when phoning people I only need to contact once or very occasionally.

Brian Lawson



Reader recommends...

Palicomp AMD Cobra PC

£400 from www.snipca.com/43515

I bought my Palicomp AMD Cobra a few months ago when you named it your favourite desktop PC (see page 30). I agree with your verdict. It's a brilliant machine – quick, quiet and free of problems.

I did have difficulty getting Audacity to work on it, but the fault lay with Audacity's settings, not with the Cobra. I contacted Palicomp and they were very helpful, trying everything to fix the problem, but it had nothing to do with the PC itself.

So far the Cobra has worked with every device I've plugged into it, without any hitches. This includes a Lector DVD player that's more than 10 years old, and numerous disk drives from past computers.

I still can't believe it cost me only £400. It's an awesome piece of kit that I would recommend to anyone.

Terry Steels

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

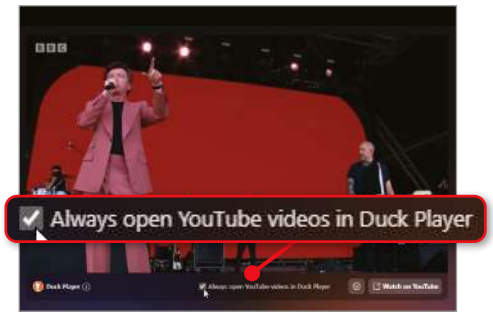
BROWSERS

Avoid YouTube ads using Duck Player

You've recommended FreeTube several times as a way of watching YouTube without adverts. However, it kept crashing for me, probably because of bugs in the program. I thought it might be better to download DuckDuckGo's browser (a direct download from https://duckduckgo.com/windows) because it has a tool called Duck Player – which you recommended in Issue 662, page 52 – that lets you watch YouTube without adverts. I've found that it's a good alternative to FreeTube.

Tick the 'Always open YouTube videos in Duck Player' box (see screenshot below) and it will become your default tool for playing videos.

Marek Wesolowski



Browser Tips

CHROME

Access side-panel features individually

Since Google added a side panel to Chrome in 2022, it has expanded the panel's options to span a range of browser features. These include your bookmarks, history, search (meaning you can search Google without leaving the current web page) and Chrome's new reading mode.

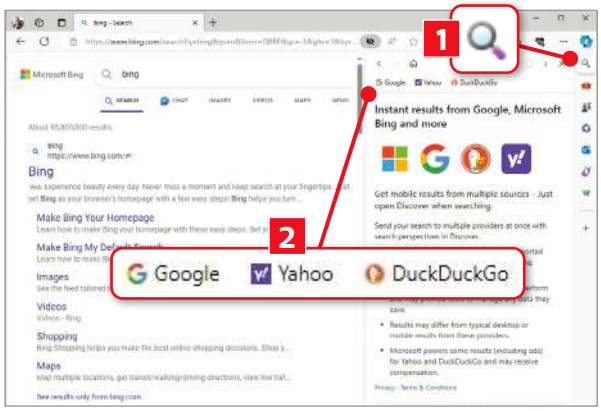
These are all instantly accessible by clicking the 'Side panel' button and choosing an option from the dropdown menu – but that could be about to change. Google is currently testing an experiment that will remove the 'Side panel' button from Chrome's toolbar, just as most of us had grown accustomed to it being there.

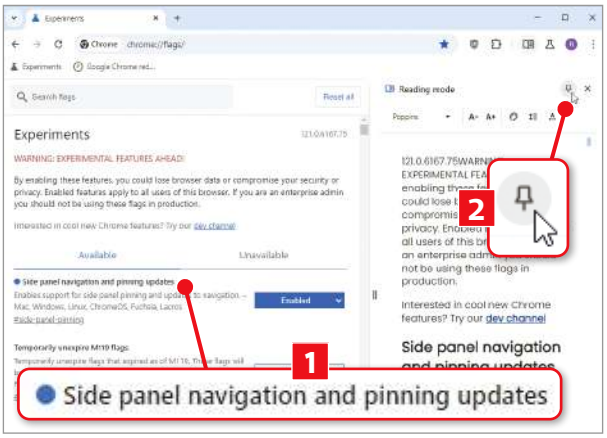
Instead, you'll be able to pin side-panel features to the toolbar, as you do with Chrome extensions. Clicking their buttons will still open a side panel, but without the dropdown menu that lets you switch between options. This simplifies the panel and means you won't be distracted by features you never use.

To try the experiment in Chrome 121 (released in January), type chrome://flags in the address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Find the entry Side panel navigation and pinning updates (1 in our screenshot below left), select Enabled in its dropdown menu and click Relaunch.

When the browser reopens, click the three-dot menu button and choose an option you want to view in a side panel – for example, 'Show all bookmarks' (in the 'Bookmarks and lists' sub-menu) or 'Reading mode' (under 'More tools'). Click the pin icon in its top-right corner 2 to pin its button to your toolbar for easy access.

One recent change to Chrome that many users aren't happy with is the relocation of the 'Search tabs' button from the top-right corner of the browser to the top-left. See our Workshop below to find out how to fix this.





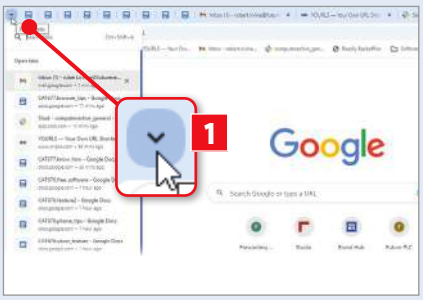
EDGE

Search with two different search engines at the same time

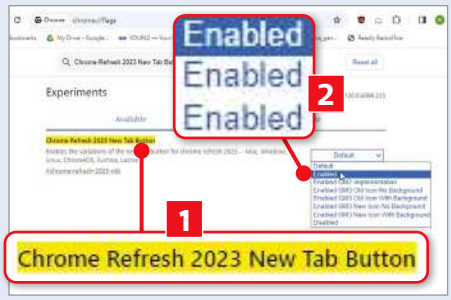
A new feature in Edge 120 (released in December) saves you having to choose between using Google, Bing or DuckDuckGo for your web searches, by letting you search with two at the same time. This doubles your chance of quickly finding the page you need, by letting you compare two sets of results without switching between separate tabs. It's also more useful than Chrome's sidebar-search option (see left), which limits you to searching with just Google.

To use the feature, search for something in Edge using your default search engine, either by typing a query in the address bar or via the search provider's website. When the results appear, click the Search button in the browser's sidebar (1 in our screenshot above) to open the Search side panel. Here you'll see three options for

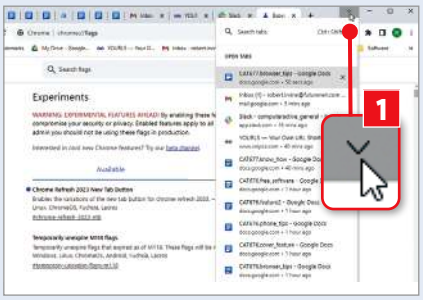
WORKSHOP Change the position of Chrome's 'Search tabs' button



1 Chrome's 'Search tabs' feature lets you search the titles of your open tabs by clicking its down-arrow button and entering a query. The browser's recent redesign moves this button from the top-right corner to the top-left 1, which you may not find as convenient – especially if you're right-handed.



2 To restore the 'Search tabs' button to its former position, type chrome://flags into the browser's address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Find the entry Chrome Refresh 2023 New Tab Button 1 and select any of the Enabled options in the dropdown menu 2 – it doesn't matter which.



3 Click 'Relaunch' and, when Chrome reopens, the 'Search tabs' button will now be back in the top-right corner of the browser 1. As before, you can click the down-arrow icon to open it, or press Ctrl+Shift+A. It's possible Google may remove the option to move the button in a future update to Chrome.

BEST EXTENSION FOR... Adding extra tools to your browser

Browser Boost
Chromium
www.snipca.com/49040
Although Chrome is now updated more frequently than ever, most new versions make only minor improvements to how it works. This extension enhances the browser – and others that use Chromium – by adding several useful features that Google has overlooked.

These include a Boost Volume tool, which lets you increase Chrome's sound level; 'Save Image As Type', which adds options to your right-click menu for downloading images in different formats; and 'Right-Click and Select', which lets you copy text from websites that have disabled the right-click function.

There's also a Change User Agent feature you can use to emulate different browsers and devices. This lets you trick sites into thinking you're using, for example, Safari on an iPhone (see screenshot), so they load their pages faster and without as much clutter.

If you don't like that, try...
User Agent Switcher
Firefox
www.snipca.com/49043
Browser Boost doesn't have a Firefox version, but you can get the 'user agent' feature from this extension, and combine it with 'Absolute Enable Right Click & Copy' (www.snipca.com/49044).

alternative search engines 2, depending on your default provider in Edge. So if Google is your default search engine, the buttons will be for Bing, DuckDuckGo and Yahoo, but if you usually use Bing then Google will be one of the buttons.

Click an option to use that search engine to look for your query. The results will appear in the side panel, where you can click them to open the relevant web pages, while the original results remain in the main browser tab.

You can switch to a different search provider using the dropdown menu.

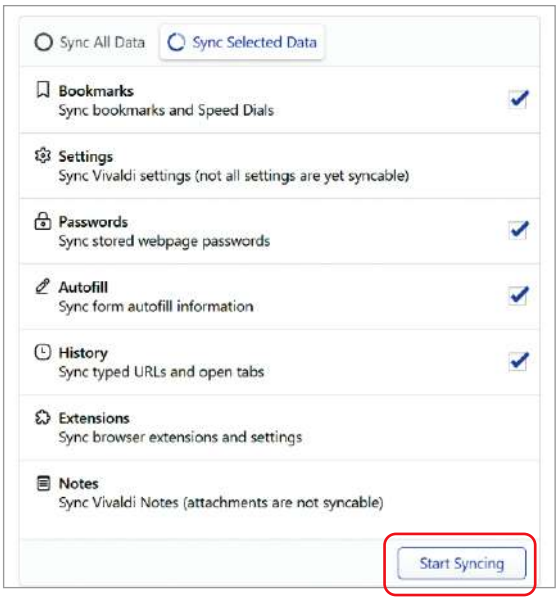
VIVALDI
Sync your entire browsing history across devices

All the main browsers now let you sync your browsing history across your desktop and mobile devices. This makes it easy to revisit pages that you viewed on your PC when on your phone or tablet – and vice versa.

Vivaldi only introduced this option at the end of last year (see Issue 674, page 18), but it's already improved the feature by letting you sync your entire history between devices. Previously, it only synced web pages and search queries that you typed into the browser's address bar, but it will now also sync any links that you open.

Switch on Sync by clicking the cloud button in the bottom-left corner of the main Vivaldi window or by clicking the 'V' menu button and choosing Settings then Sync. Sign into your Vivaldi account – or create one – and enter an encryption password to protect your synced data. Select the items you want to sync between Vivaldi's desktop browser and mobile app, such as Bookmarks, Passwords and History, then click Start Syncing (see screenshot left).

You can view all the web pages in your synced browsing history by clicking the History button in the browser's sidebar. They'll also appear as suggestions when you start typing into the address bar.



CHROMIUM & FIREFOX
Download and transcribe podcasts

Although most people listen to podcasts on their phones (around 78 per cent, according to research from Statista: www.snipca.com/49045), there's no reason why you can't enjoy them on your PC. A handy extension called Podcasts, for Chromium browsers (www.snipca.com/49047) and Firefox (www.snipca.com/49048), makes it easy to find and play podcasts from across the web, without installing special software.

You can subscribe to interesting podcasts, download individual episodes or entire series, and queue instalments to grab and listen to later. The extension also includes a Transcript feature (see screenshot above), which converts the audio content from podcasts into text, allowing you to read along.

Podcasts was recently updated to support Google's new Manifest V3 technology, and to improve its download function, and is both easy and completely free to use.

Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Create an 'art selfie' with Google Arts & Culture

Google has updated its brilliant Arts & Culture app for Android (www.snipca.com/49117) and iOS (www.snipca.com/49118) with a new AI-powered feature called Art Selfie 2. The original Art Selfie found your 'art lookalike' by matching photos of your face to the subjects of paintings in galleries and museums around the world. It was complemented by the app's Art Transfer tool, which let you apply different artists' styles to your pictures, and Art Filter, which inserted your face into famous portraits.

Art Selfie 2 combines and refines the second two features (all three are still available), allowing you to 'remix your selfie with art and AI'. To try the feature, press the Play tab in the bottom-centre of the Arts & Culture app and choose Art Selfie 2. Tap 'Get started', grant the app permission to access your camera, then take a picture of yourself.

Choose a style from the 27 options provided – these include Italian Renaissance, Tudor Royal, Renoir's Boating Party (pictured above), Medieval Knight and Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh. This will then be applied to your mugshot, altering your hair, clothes and background to reflect the relevant style. If you're not happy with the first result, tap the Refresh button in the top-right corner (see screenshot left) to try again – or select a different style.

Tap 'Share' to send your art selfie to other people, or the download button to save it to your device.

Google says it doesn't store your selfie, and only you can see the picture unless you share it. Arts & Culture also provides background information about the art style you choose, and links to virtual tours and online exhibits so you can learn more.

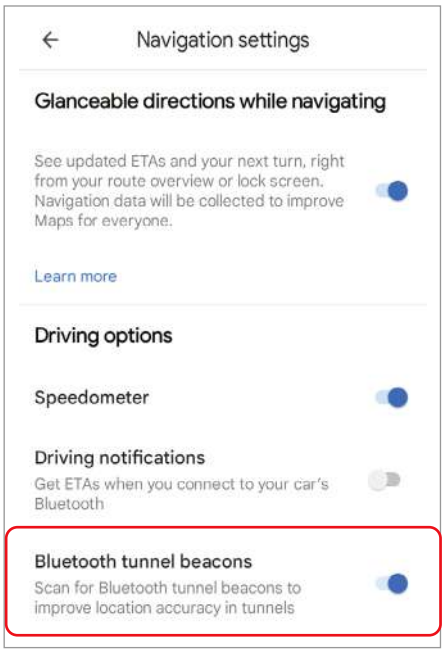
ANDROID

Keep using Google Maps in a tunnel

One problem with using Google Maps as the navigation system in your car is that when you drive through a tunnel you may lose your GPS signal. This can cause you to miss important traffic updates and exit information. To stop this happening, Google has added an option to the Maps app for Android (www.snipca.com/49122) that uses Bluetooth beacons to track your phone's position, until the GPS signal is available again.

Bluetooth beacons are installed in tunnels in many cities around the world, as well as other underground locations such as some London Tube stations. You don't have to worry about privacy issues because location information is only relayed one-way, from the beacons to your smartphone. The beacons themselves are simple battery-operated controllers that use low-powered Bluetooth.

To activate the feature, tap your profile picture in the top-right corner of the Google Maps app and choose Settings then 'Navigation settings'. Turn on the new option 'Bluetooth tunnel beacons' (see screenshot below) and give Maps permission to 'find, connect to and determine the relative position of nearby devices'.



BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

Quetta
Free
Android www.snipca.com/49120

This new private browser promises to keep you 'anonymous and safe' online. It automatically blocks ads and third-party cookies, prevents websites from fingerprinting you, upgrades connections to HTTPS and stores your data in an encrypted vault. An iOS version of Quetta will be released this Spring.

Arc Search
Free
iOS www.snipca.com/49124

Arc Search's 'Browse for me' feature speeds up your web searches by using AI to gather content from at least six sources. It compiles this information into a dedicated web page, containing text summaries, photos and videos. The app also blocks ads, trackers and cookie banners, and archives inactive tabs after one day.

Telegram
Free
Android www.snipca.com/49128
iOS www.snipca.com/49129

Telegram has been updated to expand its 'view-once' setting to voice and video messages. This lets you set messages you record to be deleted automatically once the recipient has played them. It's also now possible to pause and resume recording of voice messages, so you don't have to capture them in one go.

*Contains in-app purchases

iOS

Protect your sensitive data from thieves

The most notable new feature in iOS 17.3, which Apple released at the end of January, prevents thieves from accessing sensitive data stored on your iPhone. It's called Stolen Device Protection and adds extra security steps to information including stored payment card details, as well as requiring biometric authentication (such as Face ID or Touch ID) to view your account passwords. This means only you can access your data even if you lose your phone to someone who knows your passcode.

Additionally, some security-related actions – like changing your Apple ID password – require you to wait an hour and then pass a second biometric-authentication test. That should make it harder for a thief to meddle with your iPhone (Stolen Device Protection isn't yet available on iPads), and give you more time to mark your device as lost or remotely erase it using Apple's Find My feature.

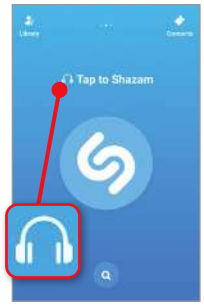
All these things only happen when your iPhone is away from what Apple terms 'familiar locations', such as your home and place of work. That ensures you won't be pestered with extra security steps while making changes, while thwarting the efforts of thieves if they take your device somewhere unfamiliar.

To switch on Stolen Device Protection, open the Settings app on your iPhone and select 'Face ID & Passcode' or 'Touch ID & Passcode'. Enter your device's passcode, then under Stolen Device Protection select Turn On Protection (see screenshot below). Disabling it again will require a Face ID scan or Touch ID scan.

ANDROID & iOS

Identify songs while wearing headphones

Apple has updated its music-recognition app Shazam with the useful ability to identify songs while you're wearing headphones. This lets you discover the titles and artists of tracks that are played in YouTube videos, Netflix shows and BBC iPlayer programmes even when you're watching and listening privately.



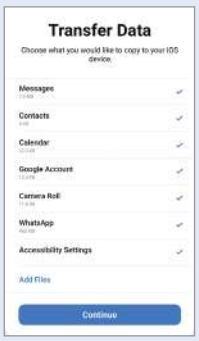
When you hear a piece of unknown music through your headphones, launch the Shazam app for Android (www.snipca.com/49125) or iOS (www.snipca.com/49126), and tap the headphones icon next to 'Tap to Shazam' on the home screen (see screenshot left) to tell it to start listening. Return to the app that's playing the song and Shazam will (hopefully) identify it for you.

The new feature works with both wired and Bluetooth headphones. Shazam will also recognise music that's playing out loud in your vicinity, without you needing to unplug your headphones.

BEST APPS FOR... Copying data to a new phone

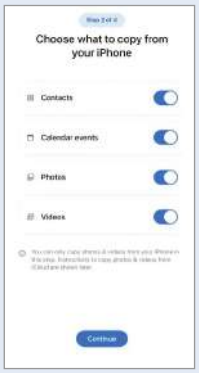
Move to iOS

Free
Android www.snipca.com/49130
Switching from an Android phone to an iPhone is surprisingly easy with the help of Apple's official app. Make sure both devices are connected to the same Wi-Fi network, enter the code displayed on your new iPhone and select the data you want to transfer, including messages, contacts, photos and WhatsApp chats.
Best For Moving to an iPhone



Switch to Android

Free
iOS www.snipca.com/49131
Google's equivalent app, for switching in the other direction, is equally simple to use. As well as copying contacts, photos, videos and calendar events from an iPhone to an Android phone, you can switch off iMessage so that messages are sent to Google Messages instead, and copy content from iCloud to Google Photos.
Best For Moving to an Android phone



Samsung Smart Switch Mobile

Free
Android www.snipca.com/49132
iOS www.snipca.com/49133
Samsung's Smart Switch app caters to both Android and iPhone users who want to transfer data to a Galaxy phone. You can either do so wirelessly or by connecting the devices with a USB-C or Lightning cable, and copy over contacts, calendar events, photos and videos – plus messages from another Android phone.
Best For Moving to a Samsung phone

*Contains in-app purchases

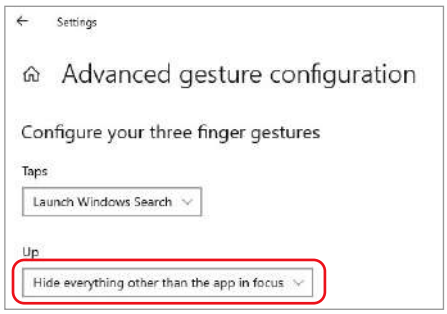
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Swipe your touchpad to close windows

You can configure your laptop's touchpad with advanced gestures that perform different functions using one, two, three or four fingers. You can swipe up and down with two fingers to scroll on a page, for example. When you swipe up with three or four fingers, you open Task View. But you can change these to perform other tasks, if you want.

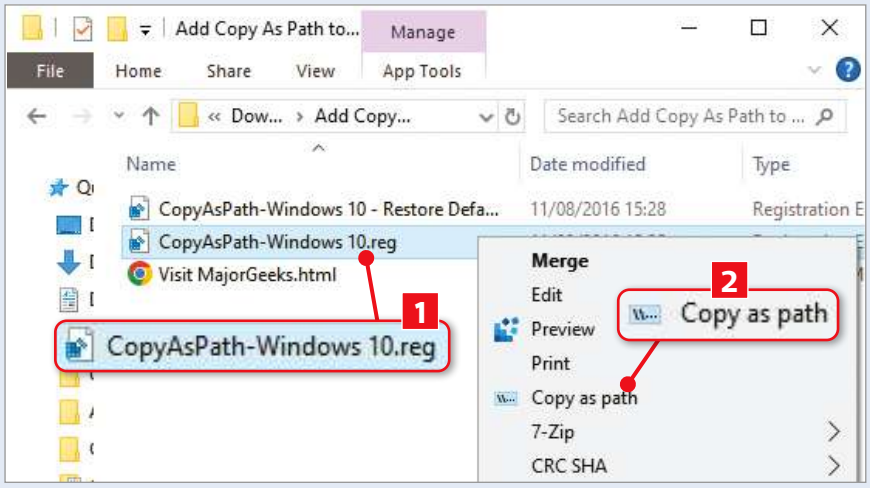
One useful function is to hide all windows apart from the one you're focusing on. Type Advanced touchpad into Windows search, then click Open. In Windows 10 click the Up dropdown menu under 'Configure your three finger gestures' and choose 'Hide everything other than the app in focus' (see screenshot below). You can also choose this setting in the 'four-finger' Up menu. This menu is called 'Swipe up' in Windows 11.

Now, when you swipe up with three (or four) fingers, every window apart from the one you're working in will minimise.



WINDOWS 10

Add 'Copy as path' to right-click menu



'Copy as path' is a right-click option that lets you copy the file path of files and folders. In Windows 10, it's an 'extended command' – meaning it appears only if you press Shift before right-clicking a file or folder.

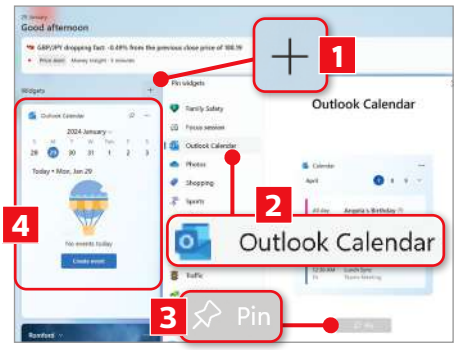
You can add it to your right-click menu without having to press Shift by downloading a clever little tool from MajorGeeks.com. Visit www.snipca.com/49150 then click the grey Download Now button at the top (next to the military stripes). Extract and open the ZIP file, then click 'CopyAsPath-Windows 10.reg' (1 in our screenshot). Running this program will change your registry, so Windows will show a box warning of possible risks. This program is safe, so click Yes.

Now, when you right-click a file or folder, you'll see 'Copy as path' 2.

WINDOWS 11

Add your Outlook calendar as a widget

Press Windows key+W and you'll see the Windows 11 widgets board, showing useful information such as traffic updates and weather forecasts. You can add your Outlook calendar to the board as a widget, showing your upcoming events. Click the plus icon (1 in our screenshot below left), then Outlook Calendar 2, followed by Pin 3. The widget will be added to the top of your board 4.



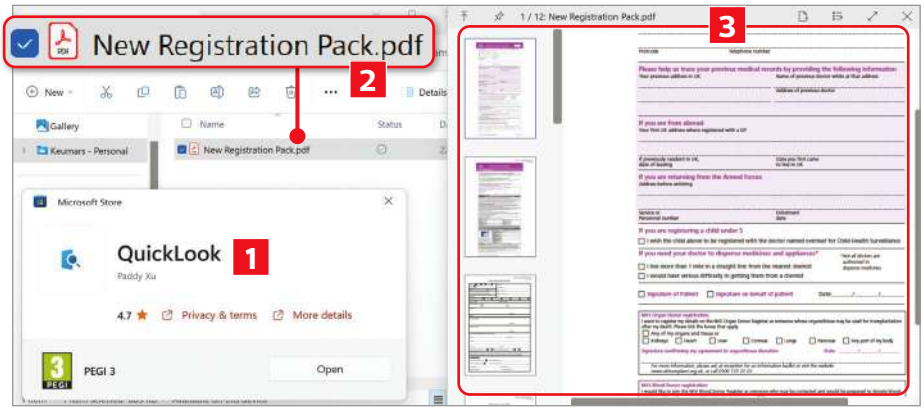
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Preview files using spacebar

Apple Macs have a tool called Quick Look that shows you a preview of a file without opening it. Windows doesn't have an equivalent built in, though you can do something similar using the Peek tool PowerToys. This requires you to select a file then press Ctrl+Space.

You can make this a little easier using the unofficial QuickLook tool from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/49151, 1 in our screenshot below). Install and open it, and then when you select an image or PDF file 2 on your PC just tap your spacebar to see a preview of what the file contains 3.

It also shows you folder details if you select a folder and press spacebar. Both these work without you having to press the Ctrl key.

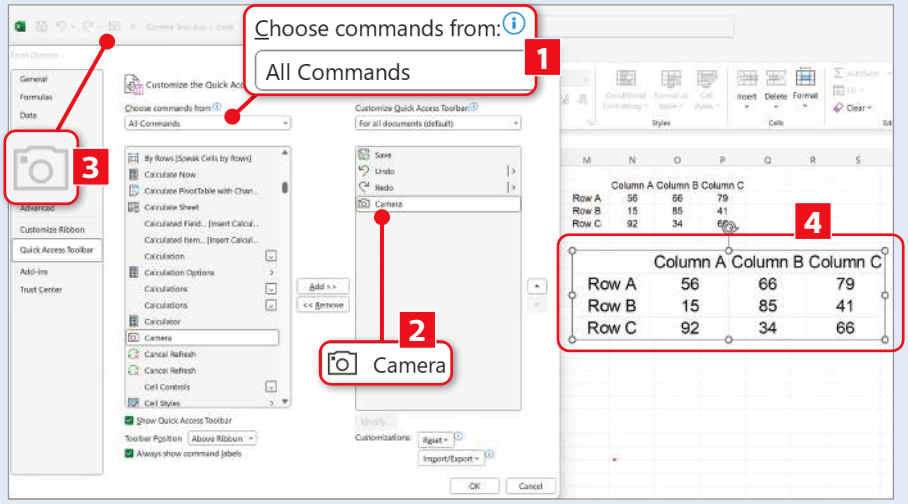


MICROSOFT EXCEL

Create a 'data dashboard' that updates in real time

Using Excel's Camera tool you can take a picture of your data that updates as you change the data in the original spreadsheet. The best use of this is to take pictures of tables split across a few sheets, then paste them all into a new tab to create a 'dashboard'. As you update the tables across your spreadsheet, the changes will appear in your dashboard's pictures.

To start, open your spreadsheet then click the small arrow at the top left of the toolbar, then More Commands. Next, click the dropdown menu under 'Choose commands from:' and choose All Commands (1 in our screenshot). Scroll down until you see the Camera option. Click it, then click Add in the middle. You'll see Camera move to the right-hand column 2. Click OK and the Camera tool will appear in your Quick Access Toolbar 3.



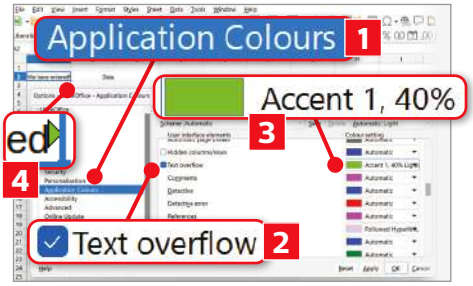
Now highlight your data, then click the Camera icon. Draw a box around your table, and the image will appear in your spreadsheet 4. You can now move or resize this image like any other. Any changes you make in your spreadsheet will be mirrored in this picture.

LIBREOFFICE CALC

Change the colour of the text-overflow indicator

If you type too much text into a cell in your table, LibreOffice Calc shows a small arrow at the right of the cell. This is red by default, but since LibreOffice 7.6 (released last August) you've been able to change its colour.

Click Tools at the top, then Options. In the box that appears, expand the LibreOffice menu in the left-hand panel and click Application Colours (1 in our screenshot below). Scroll down the right-hand side until you see 'Text overflow' 2, which should be ticked by default. Now click the Automatic dropdown menu beside it, and choose a new colour from the list. We chose a bright green (Accent 1, 40% lighter 3). Click Apply, then OK. Now, when a cell overflows with text, the arrow will show in the colour you chose 4.



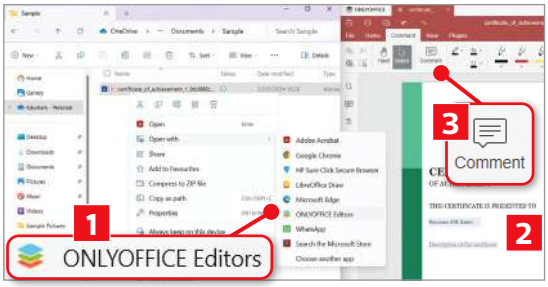
If you don't want a text-overflow arrow of any colour just untick the box.

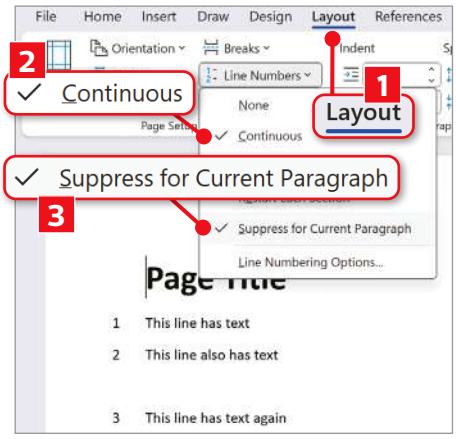
ONLYOFFICE

Edit and fill in PDFs

Version 7.5 of OnlyOffice (released in October) lets you edit PDF files and fill in forms – tools that were already available in the online version (www.onlyoffice.com). There are a number of free templates you can use – see them at https://oforms.onlyoffice.com. We chose the 'Certificate of achievement template 1', which you can download from www.snipca.com/49085.

First, right-click your PDF, then hover your cursor over 'Open with' and click 'OnlyOffice Editors' (1 in our screenshot below). Your file will now open in OnlyOffice 2. Click the Comment tab 3 to choose from a range of editing options, including highlighters and pen styles – or just click one of the highlighted words and type.





MICROSOFT WORD

Exclude sections when numbering lines

When numbering lines in Word, you may need to exclude some from the list – such as titles or blank sections. To do this, click Layout (1 in our screenshot above), then the Line Numbers dropdown menu followed by Continuous 2. Next, click the line that you want to exclude, then click Line Numbers again, followed by 'Suppress for Current Paragraph' 3. Do this for every line you want to exclude. In our screenshot we've removed numbers from the title, and between lines two and three.

In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

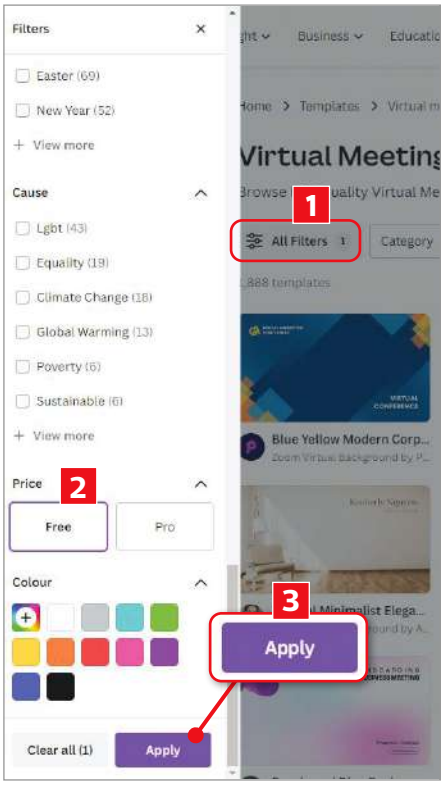
Add backgrounds to your videos

One way to make a video meeting feel more welcoming is to appear in front of an appropriate background. For example, having your club logo or club colours as a background helps people identify you as the person running the meeting. Making your own background is reasonably easy, so let's get started.

Create and upload your logo

We'll use the fantastic free design tool Canva, which we've recommended several times in this column for creating infographics (Issue 672), mugs (657) and email signatures (642).

You can either use Canva's website (www.canva.com), or download its Windows app from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/49008). In either case, create an account, sign in, then type Virtual meeting background into the search bar. A number of templates will appear.



Use Canva's search filters to see only the free templates

As with all Canva graphics, templates marked with a crown icon in the bottom-right are available only for paying Canva members. Those marked with a £ sign are 'Paid', which means you'll have to pay to use some elements of them – similar to making in-app purchases. If you want to see only the free templates, click All Filters (1 in our screenshot below left), scroll down the panel on the left, then click Free 2 followed by Apply 3. This reduced the number of templates we could see from over 7,400 to 1,888.

Once you've found a template you like, click to open it, then click the blue 'Customise this template' button. To add your logo, click Uploads on the left, then either drag it into the black panel that appears or click the purple 'Upload file' and add it from your computer. Double-click it and it'll appear on top of your template on the right.

If your logo doesn't have a transparent background, we suggest adding a border to its edge so it resembles a picture hanging on a wall. Click the logo (1 in our screenshot below) followed by 'Border style' 2 and choose a style and thickness 3.

Once you're happy with the background, click the top-right Share button followed by Download. Choose JPEG or PNG as the format then click the purple Download button.

Add a border to your logo so that it stands out against your background

Add your logo to Zoom and it will appear in the Virtual Backgrounds section

Un-mirror your background

Now go to your video tool and upload the background. How you do this will depend on which meeting program you're using, but it will probably be similar to these instructions for the desktop version of Zoom (https://zoom.us/download). We're using the desktop version because Zoom online doesn't support virtual backgrounds.

Launch Zoom, click the settings cog on the left, then select 'Background & Effects'. Now click the small plus (+) button followed by 'Add image'. Upload your background image to Zoom and it will appear as an option in the Virtual Backgrounds section (1 in our screenshot above).

You'll see that the text is back to front. This is because zoom flips your video into a mirror image, which is more familiar to you and so less distracting than seeing a true image that moves left when you move right, and so on. Only you will see this mirrored image – those in the meeting will see a true version with you and the logo the right way round. If seeing the back-to front version annoys you, untick 'Mirror my video' 2 so the background looks normal to you (we've done that in our screenshot). This won't affect the view for others in the meeting.

Next issue: Embed Facebook posts on your website

What's All the

Fuss About...

Amazon Neighbours

The video-sharing doorbell app may be coming to the UK

What is it?

An app connected to Amazon's Ring doorbells that lets you share photos and videos of suspicious people and activities. You can also send alerts to warn about local crime. After a successful American launch in 2018 (as Neighbors, minus the 'u'), Amazon is considering bringing it to the UK.

So it's nothing to do with a certain Australian soap opera?

No, though confusingly enough if you search for 'Amazon Neighbours' you'll get loads of results about the show. That's because it's now being broadcast on Freevee, which is owned by... Amazon.

How does it work?

It uses a phone app to create a radius around your home (pictured above right). You'll get a notification if a Ring user shares anything within that radius. You can comment on these alerts to add information, such as locations to avoid.

How big is the radius?

You can change it to suit your area. Narrow it to focus on what Ring calls "hyper-local" issues, or if you live in a rural location expand it to "include nearby communities and landmarks" (see www.snipca.com/49171).

Can you share footage of suspicious-looking people?

Yes, leading to criticism from privacy groups that it can be used by vigilantes to target people. Others have blamed Ring for creating a culture of 'curtain twitching' and said that encouraging people to share videos can make crime seem more common than it is.

What does Ring say about that?

Its chief executive Liz Hamren told the *Telegraph* that people have become used to surveillance cameras. "When you walk into a retail store, in an airport, a mall, across the world, there are cameras," she said. However, some of the criticism has clearly hit home because in January Ring

> "Many have blamed Ring for creating a culture of 'curtain twitching'"

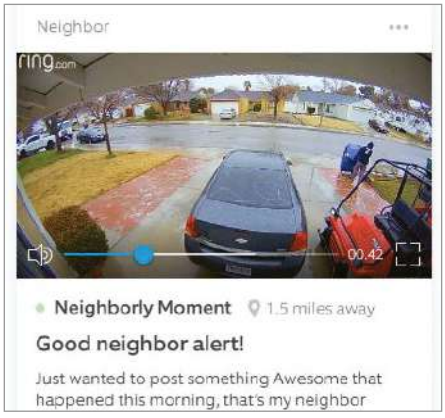
changed its rules so US police forces can ask for videos only "when there is an imminent danger of death or serious physical injury, such as a kidnapping or an attempted murder". Previously, they were able to ask Ring users for footage of any incident.

What rules would it have in the UK?

Not sure yet, though they're likely to be similar. Ms Hamren wants to launch the service in other countries, and says that the UK is "one of the biggest and most important markets". It has the potential to be hugely popular here. Ofcom says that almost one in five British households (18 per cent) have a smart doorbell, security camera or alarm system – up from five per cent in 2020.

Why the recent growth?

It started with the Covid lockdowns. As



Everybody needs good neighbours – and Ring lets you share videos of them in action

more people ordered items to be delivered to their home, opportunistic thieves started to grab packages left on the doorstep. People turned to video doorbells as a deterrence. If it came to the UK, it might help to compensate for Neighbourhood Watch losing half its membership since 2000. These days many residents are more likely to share crime updates on Facebook, Nextdoor and WhatsApp.

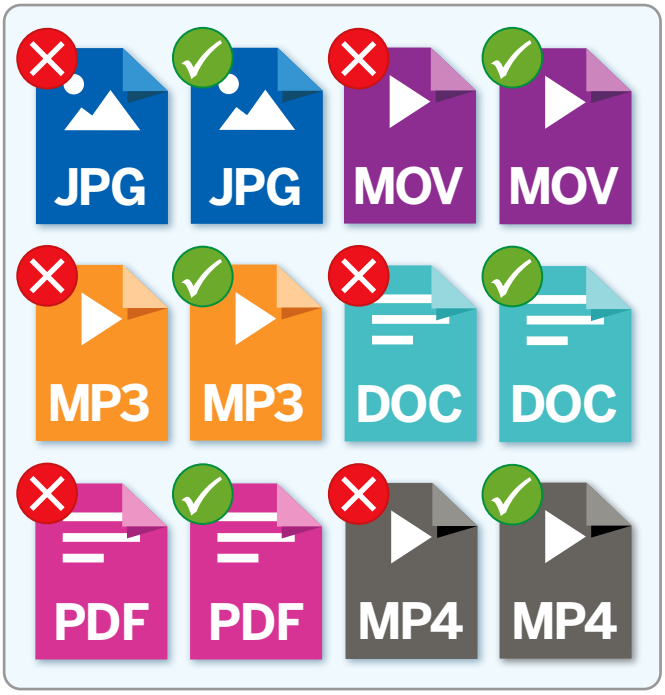
Can you share other types of doorbell videos?

Yes – Ring doesn't want it to be all bad news. In 2020, it launched Neighborly Moments (pictured left), which lets users share "good deeds" such as clearing snow from a path, collecting a package or bringing the bins in. There are even rumours of Ring launching a video-based social network. Ms Hamren said she's "excited about people being able to share a wide range of videos with their neighbours".

Doesn't that sound like a privacy nightmare?

Absolutely. Everybody needs good neighbours, but they won't stay that way if you spam them with videos.

Remove All Your DUPLICATE FILES



Surplus copies of photos, videos and documents can significantly slow your PC, phone and tablet. Robert Irvine reveals the most reliable free ways to find and delete them

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Scan your hard drive for all unwanted copies of files
- Safely remove duplicates without losing the original versions
- Compare the content of files as well as their names and sizes
- Automatically preview images before you delete them
- Search for similar files as well as exact doubles
- Merge duplicate photos on your phone or tablet
- Free up space in your online storage accounts

Duplicate files don't pose an obvious threat to your PC, aside from cluttering your folders with extra versions of documents, photos, videos and other items. But as they accumulate, they'll have a detrimental effect on the speed and stability of your system, without you realising they're to blame.

Not only do duplicates consume valuable hard-drive space, but they also mean your computer has to work harder to perform everyday tasks. Whenever it runs a malware scan, updates its search index or creates a backup, it's forced to include these unnecessary copies, which significantly slows everything down.

Duplicates creep on to your PC in a variety of ways. You may have downloaded the same files twice, copied items instead of moving them, selected 'Save as' instead of Save, backed up folders to the same drive, or installed a program that cloned files without your knowledge – Windows even does this itself.

Most PC clean-up software such as BleachBit doesn't detect duplicate files, because they're not classified as junk, which means you're probably not even aware of the extent of the problem. Thankfully, there are reliable ways to find and remove these pointless copies, but there are also plenty of rip-off tools to avoid.

In this feature, we recommend the best genuinely free duplicate cleaners, to rid your PC, phone and tablet of redundant copies, and make them tidier and faster.

WHICH DUPLICATE REMOVER SHOULD YOU USE?

GOLD AWARD

AllDup

www.snipca.com/49056

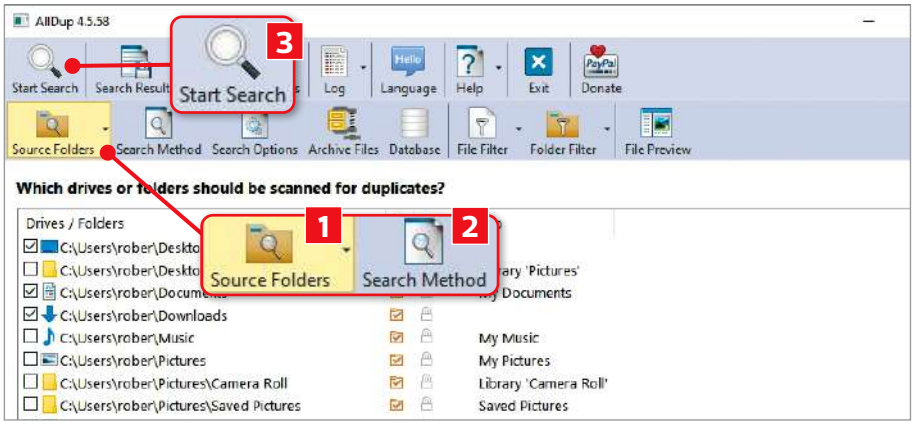
What we like

AllDup provides everything you need from a duplicate cleaner: it's versatile, powerful and speedy, and doesn't restrict any options to a paid-for version – because there isn't one. This makes it ideal for removing unnecessary copies of any type of file from your PC – from photos and videos to documents and music – so you can free up drive space and speed up your system.

To get started with AllDup simply select the drives and folders to scan for duplicates on the Source Folders tab (1 in our screenshot above right). If the drive/folder isn't listed, click the arrow next to the button and choose 'Add folder' to browse to and select it.

AllDup can also scan external drives such as USB sticks and NAS drives, and search within archive files in formats such as ZIP, RAR and 7z. It lets you lock specific drives and folders so their contents can't be altered by clicking the 'File protection' padlock icon next to them. For the purpose of this feature, we're scanning our Downloads, Documents and Desktop folders, which total 11GB in size and contain nearly 15,000 files.

Click the Search Method tab 2 to specify how AllDup should define duplicates. The default setting is 'File name', but you'll get more accurate results by also choosing 'File content'. This will help the program identify copies of files even when they're labelled 'unnamed' or things like 'IMG_3614 (1)'.



Searching for duplicates with AllDup is easy but it also offers a lot of advanced options

It can also determine duplicates by their size, file extension and creation and last-modified dates. Usefully, the dropdown Search Method menu lets you tailor your scan to include files with similar names, pictures with similar content and audio and video files of a similar length.

Click the Start Search button 3 and AllDup will check your selected drives or folders for replicas using your chosen criteria. In our initial test, using only the file name and content settings, it took a mere 22 seconds to find 1,514 duplicates across our three folders, which were consuming 244MB of drive space.

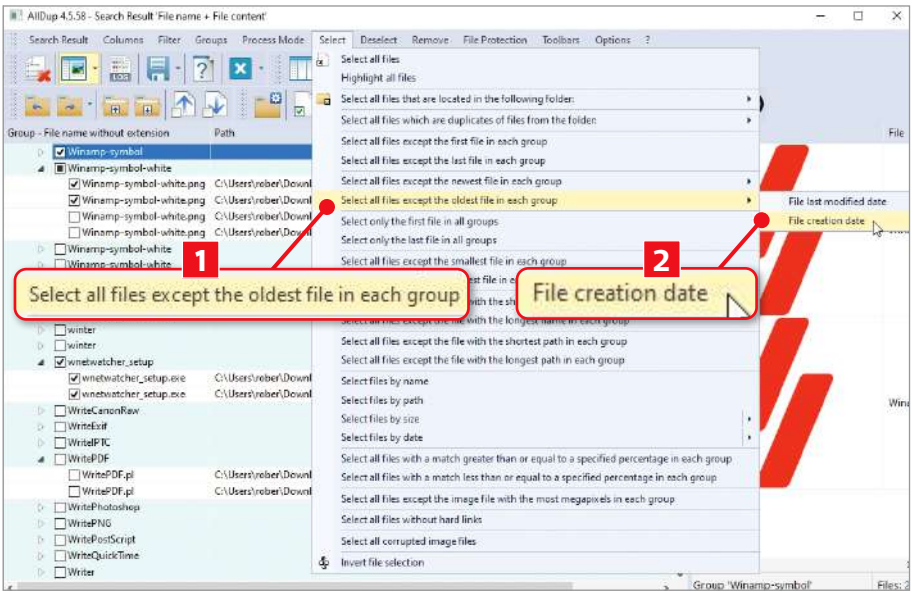
Many of these were tiny files that didn't concern us, such as elements of software code, so we clicked the File Filter tab and instructed AllDup to exclude files smaller than 1KB (1,000 bytes). This made our scan more focused and even faster, uncovering 656 duplicates in just four seconds.

AllDup's search results open in a new window, which can seem a little confusing on account of its many menus and toolbars. The most important option is the File Manager button in the top-left corner, which lets you decide how to 'process' groups of duplicates. You can either delete them, move them to the recycle bin, use 'secure delete' to make them unrecoverable or transfer them to a backup folder.

To ensure you keep the original versions of files, click the Select menu and choose 'Select all files except the oldest file in each group' (1 in our screenshot below left), then 'File creation date' 2.

There's also a 'File preview' option that shows you the content of search results before you process them. This works best with image formats, but it's possible to preview other file types by clicking the plug-ins in the File Preview toolbar, which include WordPad (for text files) and Windows Media Player (for audio and video).

Unlike our two runner-up programs, AllDup has a separate portable edition, which you can run from a USB stick to remove duplicate files from any PC.



Select all files except the oldest to preserve original files when deleting duplicates

What we don't like

AllDup's numerous settings take a while to get to grips with, especially because some need to be enabled manually. We'd prefer it to set a default file size for duplicates, so initial scans don't list irrelevant results, and to provide a quicker way to view and delete only duplicate files, while preserving the originals.

SILVER AWARD

Czkawka

www.snipca.com/49057

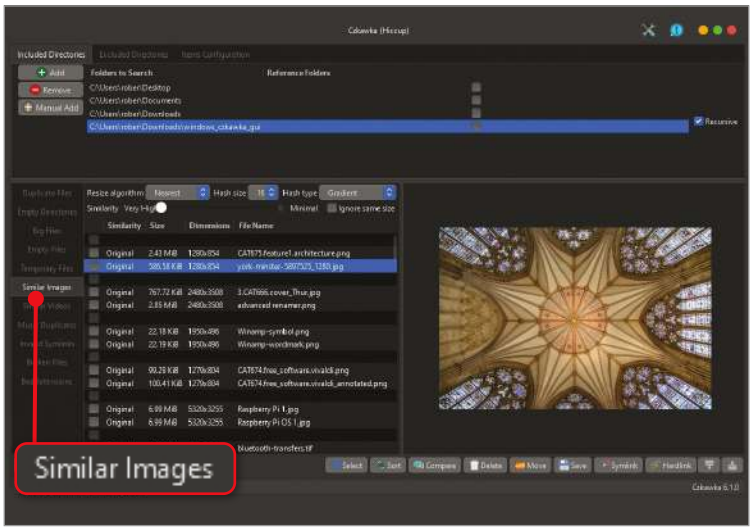
What we like

The curiously named Czkawka (which means 'hiccup' in Polish) is impressively fast at finding duplicate files, though not as thorough as AllDup. It located 291 in our three test folders in a matter of seconds, spanning a variety of formats and with a minimum file size of 16KB (you can increase this on the Items Configuration tab).

Czkawka only searches the folders you specify, and always excludes the 'C:/Windows' folder both to save you time and stop you removing essential system files. It offers four methods of checking for copies – by content (which it calls 'hash'), size, name, and size *and* name, though for most scans the first will be sufficient. It tells you exactly where the files are located on your hard drive and when they were last modified.

As well as manually ticking the duplicates you want to delete or move, you can click the Select button for a choice of options. These include 'Select all', 'Select all except oldest' (which excludes what's presumably the original version of the file) and 'Select all except biggest'. Czkawka doesn't highlight original files in its results, but it usefully shows previews of images, so you don't accidentally delete the wrong ones.

Where Czkawka excels is in its range of extra tools. You can search for similar images (see screenshot above right) and videos, not just exact doubles, and adjust the similarity level to find all the edited versions. The Music Duplicates feature lets you match titles, artists, song lengths and even bitrates, which is helpful for detecting misnamed copies of audio tracks. There are also cleanup options for large files, empty folders and corrupt items.



Czkawka finds similar photos as well as duplicates so you can view edited versions

What we don't like

Unlike AllDup, Czkawka is a little tricky to get running. Visit the Releases page at www.snipca.com/49066, click the 'windows_czkawka_gui.zip' link under Assets (click 'Show all assets' to reveal this), then extract the contents of the ZIP file and double-click the 'czkawka_gui.exe' file. The program triggers a SmartScreen warning, but it's safe to use, so click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

BRONZE AWARD

DupeGuru

www.snipca.com/49055

What we like

DupeGuru has a much simpler interface than AllDup and Czkawka, with only three 'scan modes' to choose from. 'Standard' mode looks for duplicate files in all formats, while the Music and Picture modes focus on audio and image files. Though it lacks advanced features, this makes it very easy to use – just pick your mode, choose the folder(s) you want to check and click the Scan button in the bottom-right corner.

DupeGuru's scans are efficient and accurate, using 'fuzzy logic' to identify duplicates with different names to the original files, or you can choose to only match items with the same name. In our test, it took two minutes to scan our three folders and locate 369 duplicates.

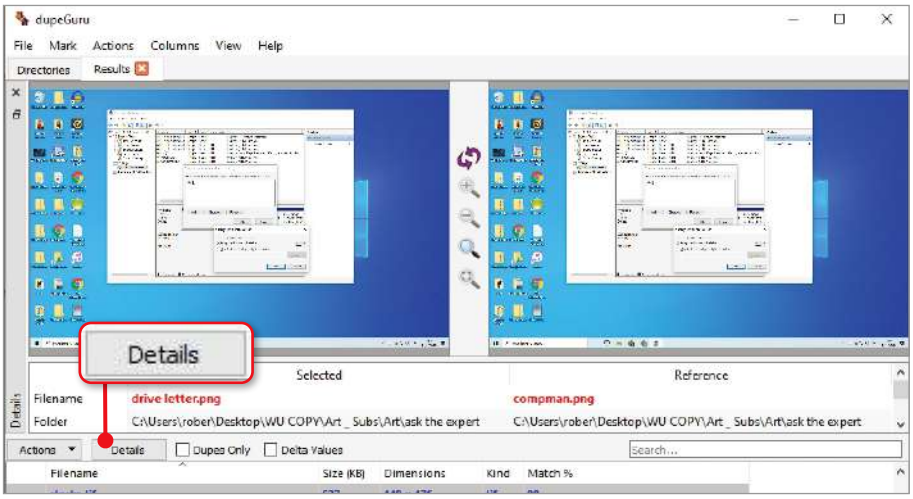
DupeGuru's results are clearly presented, with the original files highlighted in blue, accompanied by details of their file size and type, and the match percentage. Click the Columns menu to show extra information, such as the number of 'dupes' and when the files were last modified.

To simplify the view, tick 'Dupes Only', and to compare how a copy differs from the original file (in size or age) tick 'Delta Values'. You can narrow your results by clicking the More Options button and adjusting the Filter Hardness, and set DupeGuru to ignore files below a certain size.

To delete duplicates, tick the boxes next to them – or press Ctrl+A to select them all – then click the Actions menu and choose 'Send Marked to Recycle Bin'. Alternatively, press Ctrl+D to delete the selected items, or Ctrl+M to move them to a different folder.

What we don't like

Apart from being much slower than our Gold and Silver award winners, DupeGuru doesn't automatically show previews of duplicate images when you select them in your scan results. This feature is only available when you choose Picture mode and click the Details button (see screenshot left). It also lacks the option to permanently delete files without sending them to the recycle bin.



DupeGuru only previews duplicate images when you click Details in its Picture mode

ALSO TRY THESE FREE DUPLICATE REMOVERS

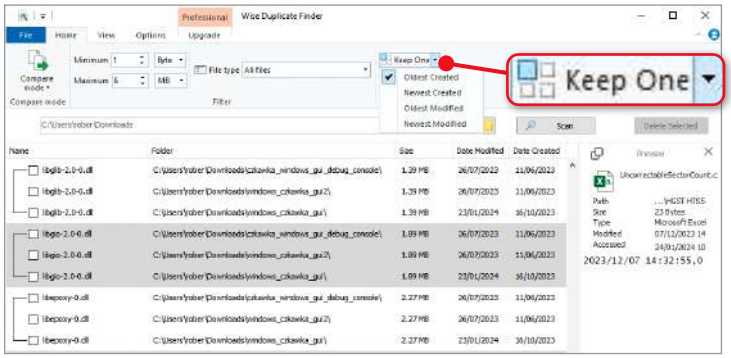
Wise Duplicate Finder

www.snipca.com/49014

Wise Duplicate Finder is easier to use than our three award winners, with simple options for specifying the file size and type – such as graphic, text or video – before you perform your duplicate search. You can also choose whether to match file names and sizes exactly, or look for partial matches.

The program provides instant previews of image files, and lets you either delete items permanently or send them to the recycle bin.

On the downside, its scans are quite slow, and the free version has an annoying restriction. It won't let you quickly select all the duplicates to delete, which means you have to tick their boxes individually. To unlock that option, which Wise calls Keep One (see screenshot above right), you need to upgrade to the Pro edition for £11.29 a year.

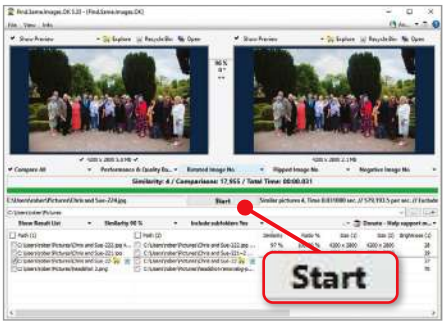


Wise Duplicate Finder's free version lacks the essential Keep One feature

Find.Same.Images.OK

www.snipca.com/49072

If you only want to find and delete duplicate photos, try this tiny but surprisingly powerful free tool. Select the drive or folder to scan by clicking one of the three-dot buttons next to the file-path field, then click Start (see screenshot below left) and the program will quickly scan for copies of pictures.



Find.Same.Images.OK offers an easy to way to remove duplicate photos

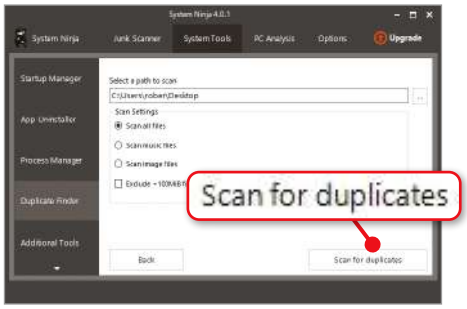
Cleverly, it can detect similar images even if they've been resized, rotated or flipped, and allows you to adjust the similarity level. After comparing previews of the results, you can delete a duplicate by right-clicking it and choosing Recycle Bin or moving it to a different folder.

We particularly like the 'Select the better pictures' option, which automatically ticks the boxes for the best-quality versions. The program supports all the main image formats, including JPEG, PNG, BMP, TIFF and RAW, and though it's a little rough in design, it works very well.

System Ninja

www.snipca.com/47597

Like its disgraced rival CCleaner, the excellent free cleanup tool System Ninja includes a duplicate-file finder, which could save you installing a separate program. Click the System Tools tab, then Duplicate Finder, select 'Find matching files globally' and click Next. Select the folder or drive you want to scan by clicking the three-dot button next to the file-path box, and choose whether to scan all files, or just music or image files. You can also exclude files that are larger than 100MB. Click the 'Scan for duplicates' button (see screenshot above) and System Ninja will list copies of files alongside their originals, and let you delete them with a single click. It's pretty basic, with no file previews (though you can open their containing folders to check their contents), but the scans are fast so it's worth a look if you already have it installed.



System Ninja includes a basic but speedy tool for deleting duplicate files

Avoid Duplicate Downloads

www.snipca.com/49075

Your browser's Downloads folder is likely to be crammed with copies of photos, videos, documents, ZIP archives and program installers. This is because when you download a file you've forgotten you already have, your browser creates another version – with a (1) after its name – rather than overwriting the original.

You can stop this happening by installing this new extension for Chromium browsers. When you download a file that's in your Downloads folder, Avoid Duplicate Downloads will ask if you want to replace it, rather than create a clone. Click 'Yes' to overwrite the original or No to cancel the download. It's more about prevention than cure, but it's still a useful tool for dealing with duplicates.

Dodgy duplicate cleaners you should avoid

Auslogics Duplicate File Finder

www.snipca.com/49076

This program tries to foist other Auslogics products on your PC when you install it, and devotes a whole tab to advertising them. It's not even very good at detecting duplicates, finding only five in our three test folders

Duplicate Video Search

www.duplicatevideosearch.com

Although Duplicate Video Search has a Free Download button on its website, all its features require you to buy a licence for $29.95 (£23.50). This means you can't even look for duplicate videos, let alone remove them.

DupKiller

www.dupkiller.com

DupKiller was probably a great duplicate cleaner in its day, but sadly that was 16 years ago – when the program was last updated. Unless you still have a floppy-disk drive (which is one of DupKiller's options), it's safer to use a modern tool.

Computer active

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EXPERT TIPS FOR REMOVING DUPLICATE FILES

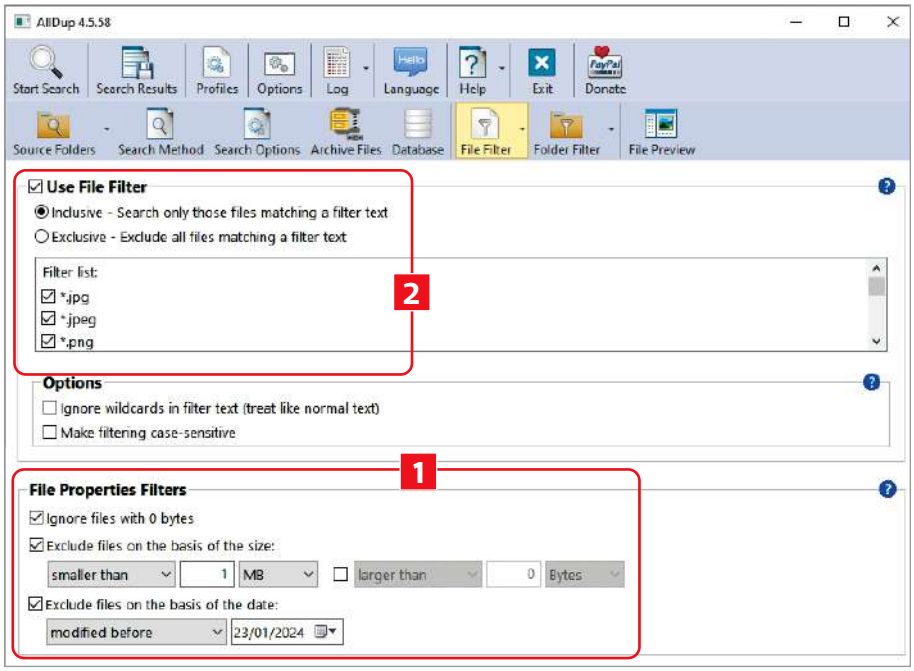
Adjust your search settings

As we found when testing AllDup (see page 51), if you leave some duplicate cleaners at their default settings they'll find hundreds of irrelevant results. These are usually the tiny files contained in software packages and web pages, which don't consume much drive space or slow your PC.

To make your scans faster and more accurate, and save you sifting through lots of obscure results, set a minimum size for duplicates. DupeGuru ignores anything smaller than 10KB, while Czkawka has a minimum of 16KB.

In AllDup, click the File Filter tab and, in the File Properties Filters section (1 in our screenshot right), tick 'Exclude files on the basis of the size'. Select 'smaller than' in the dropdown menu and enter a minimum size for duplicate matches – to focus on larger files, choose MB in the second menu. You can also exclude files that were created or modified before or after a specific date.

To set AllDup to only look for certain file types, tick Use File Filter 2 and choose the relevant file extensions in the 'Filter list', such as '.jpg', '.jpeg' and '.png' to find duplicate photos. If you want to include files inside compressed archives, click the Archive Files tab, tick 'Scan the following archive types' and choose the relevant formats, such as '.zip'.

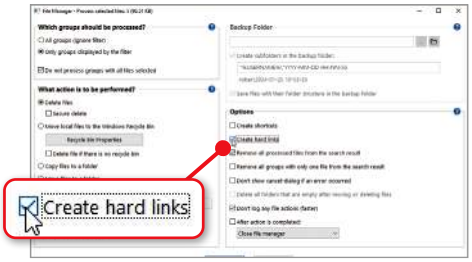


Narrow your duplicate search to include only files of a certain size and type

Replace duplicates with hard links

If you're worried that deleting certain duplicates could cause performance problems, consider replacing copies of files with 'hard links'. This combines all the items in a group of duplicates into links to the original file, which frees up space from your hard drive and potentially speeds up your PC.

Hard links are mainly used in Linux, but are available on Windows drives that are formatted with NTFS (rather than FAT32). To access the feature in AllDup, select a group of duplicates in your search results, then click the File Manager button on the toolbar. Select the action you want to perform, such as deleting files or moving them to the recycle bin, and choose 'Create hard links' in the Options section on the right (see screenshot below left). Click 'OK' and your duplicates will be processed and replaced with hard links.



Free up drive space without losing data by converting duplicates into hard links

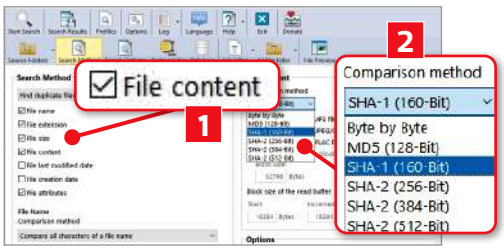
Incidentally, you can disable AllDup's scary warning that 'Deleting files could render your system inoperable', by unticking 'Show protection note'.

To stop hard links appearing in AllDup's search results (so you can focus on actual files) click the Remove menu in the search-results window and choose 'Remove all hard links from the search result'. Alternatively, click the Search Method tab in the main window and tick 'Don't compare the content of hard linked files'.

Detect duplicates using checksums

Any duplicate cleaner worth its salt will let you search for copies of files based on their content. This makes it easier to find duplicates that have different names and file sizes to the original. However, it can also lead to slower scans, because the program needs to perform a byte-by-byte comparison of every file – which is particularly time-consuming with high-resolution photos.

To solve this problem, the best duplicate removers use checksums to identify duplicates. These are like digital fingerprints of files, which can be used to quickly match them to other files with the same checksum value, without analysing every byte. If a change is made to one file, its checksum is updated and it will no longer match its former duplicate.



AllDup's checksums feature helps it identify duplicates quickly and precisely

AllDup automatically creates checksums when you select 'File content' (1 in our screenshot above) on its Search Method tab. You'll see a choice of checksum algorithms in the 'Comparison method' menu 2. Usefully, AllDup also uses checksums for its 'Find similar pictures' search, which means photos with minor variations will have the same values. To store checksums, so AllDup can find duplicates faster in future, click the Database tab, select 'Use database with the following search methods' and tick 'File content' and 'Similar pictures'.

Alternatively, choose 'Byte by Byte' as the 'Comparison method', and specify – as a percentage – how closely duplicates should match the original files.

REMOVE DUPLICATES FROM YOUR PHONE & TABLET

Remove duplicates from your Android device

There are lots of dubious duplicate cleaners in the Google Play Store, which are either stuffed with adverts and trackers, or make you pay to remove any files they find. Fortunately, you can avoid these apps by installing the brilliant free file manager 'Files by Google' (www.snipca.com/49081), which includes a duplicate remover among its arsenal of useful clean-up tools.

The app works across your Android phone or tablet, as well as your SD card; it has no ads or in-app purchases; and it's easy and even fun to use, thanks to its cute animated assistant.

To use the duplicate cleaner, tap Clean in the bottom-left corner of the Files home screen (1 in our screenshot right). Find the 'Delete files' card and tap 'Select files' 2. If you can't see this card, you either don't have any duplicates on your device, or they've been created too recently to be detected by the app.

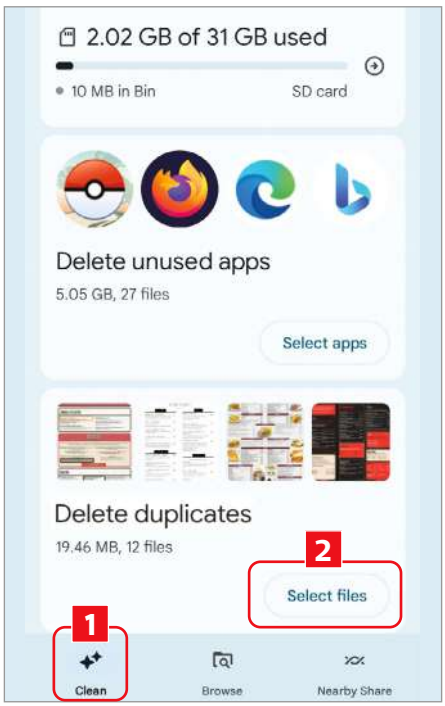
Files will now display a list of all the duplicate documents, photos, videos and other files on your phone or tablet. Select the ones you want to delete – or choose 'All duplicates – and tap 'Move [number of files] to bin'. All the copies will swiftly be removed, while the original versions remain intact.

Samsung Galaxy phones and tablets provide a similar feature in the built-in My Files app. Tap 'Analyse storage' (or 'Manage storage') on the app's home screen and select 'Duplicate files'. Any duplicates on your device will then be listed alongside the original files. Choose the copies you want to get rid of and tap Delete.

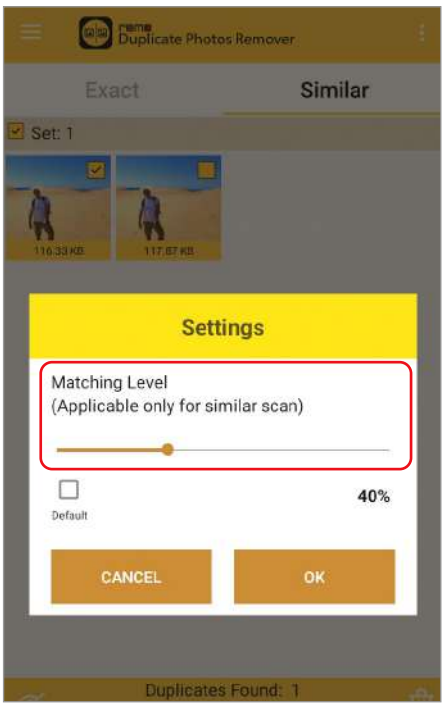
Remove duplicate photos from your phone or tablet

One limitation to 'Files by Google' is that it identifies duplicates by name and size, rather than content, which means it may miss some clones of photos. To perform a more thorough purge of duplicate pictures, install Remo Duplicate Photos Remover, which is available for both Android (www.snipca.com/49086) and iOS (www.snipca.com/49087).

Unlike most duplicate cleaners, this app is completely free to use and contains no ads. Simply tap Scan on its home screen and it will search your phone or tablet for copies of photos. The results appear on the Exact tab, accompanied by details of how much space they're consuming – tap an image to see its location and when it was last modified.



'Files by Google' makes it easy to delete duplicates from your Android device

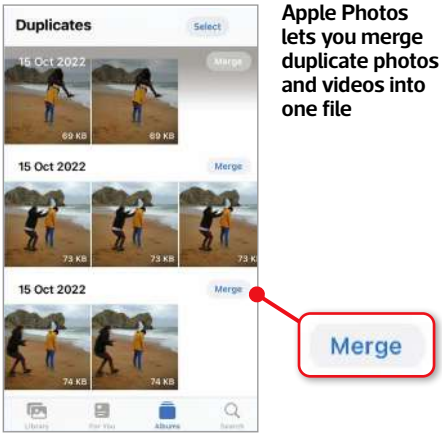


Remove Duplicate Photos Remover finds similar pictures on your phone

If Remo Duplicate Photos Remover can't find any exact doubles, tap the Similar tab then tap Scan Now. This will look for very similar versions of photos – tap the three-dot menu and choose Settings to adjust the 'matching level' (see screenshot above right), then press Rescan. Select any duplicates you don't want (the app prevents you from erasing all copies, so that you always keep one), and tap Delete.

Merge duplicate photos on your iPhone or iPad

Apple's tight restrictions on iOS apps, and its reliance on iCloud for file storage, means there aren't many free tools for deleting duplicates from your iPhone or iPad (with the exception of Remo Duplicate Photos Remover – see our previous tip).



Apple Photos lets you merge duplicate photos and videos into one file

However, you might not even need one, because the built-in Apple Photos app offers the handy option of merging duplicate photos and videos into single files. This not only saves space, but makes your photo library a lot tidier.

To use the feature, open the Photos app and tap Albums (on an iPhone), or swipe inwards from the left of the screen to open the sidebar (on an iPad). Select the Duplicates option under Utilities, and all copies of your photos and videos will be displayed next to the originals, including versions with different resolutions, metadata and other slight variations.

Tap the Merge button next to any group of duplicates (see screenshot left), then 'Merge [number of items]'. This will combine the highest-quality version of the picture or video with relevant duplicate data, and move all the surplus copies to the Recently Deleted folder, where you can recover them if required.

To merge all your duplicates in one go, tap Select, then Select All and tap Merge. Alternatively, tap the bin icon to delete them, but make sure to deselect at least one copy.

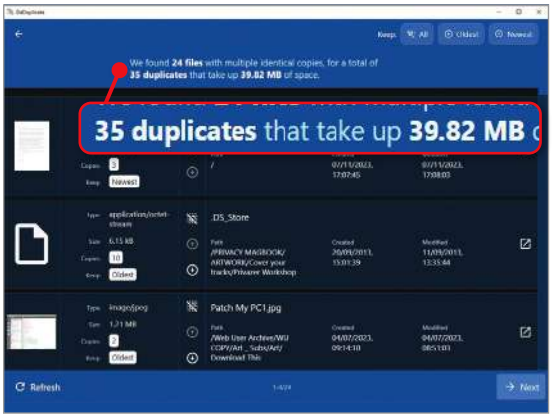
REMOVE DUPLICATES FROM ONLINE STORAGE

Although duplicates stored in the 'cloud' don't take up room on your PC, they can end up costing you. Most online storage services, including Google Drive, OneDrive and Dropbox, only give you a limited amount of space for free, so you shouldn't waste it on surplus copies of photos, videos and other large files.

Frustratingly, online-storage services don't provide their own options for detecting duplicates – perhaps because it's in their interest to get you to pay for more space. However, there are a couple of workarounds you can try.

DeDuplicate (www.snipca.com/49089) is designed to detect and remove doubled-up files from cloud-storage services, including Google Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox, Mega and Box. Install its PC program or mobile app, grant it access to your account with the online service and choose whether to scan the entire drive or specific folders. This can take a while, depending on how many items you have stored.

Once the scan is complete, DeDuplicate will list all the duplicates it's found and let you decide which ones to delete – by default it keeps the oldest copy. It tells you how many files will be removed, and how much space will be freed (see screenshot below), and lets you restore items you've deleted accidentally.



DeDuplicate finds and deletes duplicate files in online-storage services – for a price

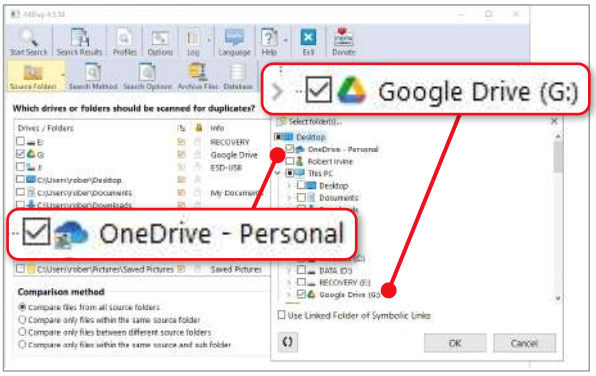
Merge duplicate contacts on your phone

It's not unusual to have more than one entry for the same person in the Contacts list on your phone. This is often because their details have been added from different sources, which can lead to the list becoming repetitive and unwieldy. Happily it's an easy problem to fix.

On an Android phone, open the Contacts app, tap 'Fix & manage' and select 'Merge and fix'. Next, select 'Merge duplicates' to view the names of contacts with more than one entry, then tap 'Merge all'. From now on, your phone should automatically offer to merge duplicate entries.

On an iPhone running iOS 16 or later, open the Phone app and tap Contacts. The app will tell you if it detects any duplicate contacts. Press 'View Duplicates' to see the details, then choose Merge All.

The catch is that DeDuplicate's iOS app costs £7.99 (www.snipca.com/49090), its Windows app (www.snipca.com/49091, pictured below left) is priced £6.69 and the Android version (www.snipca.com/49092) costs £1.29 a month. Unless you perform regular clean-ups, this may not seem worth the money, but you can try the Windows and Android apps for free, for 24 and 48 hours respectively. The trial lets you perform full online-storage scans and delete detected duplicates, though the Android version requires you to watch ads first.



Add online-storage drives to your duplicate cleaner to scan them for copies of files

An alternative option, which won't cost you anything, is to search your cloud drive using one of our recommended duplicate removers (see pages 51 and 52). This will let you delete copies of files in the same way as items stored locally on your PC.

You'll first need to download the online-storage service's desktop program, unless you want to scan OneDrive, which is built into Windows 10 and 11 (get it from www.snipca.com/49094 if you've uninstalled it). Download the Google Drive app for desktop from www.snipca.com/49095 and Dropbox from www.snipca.com/49096. Sign into your account with the service, and ensure you can browse the files and folders you have stored online – turn off automatic backup from your PC, to prevent new duplicates being created.

Open your preferred duplicate cleaner and add the cloud drive's folder as a location to scan. In our screenshot above, we've added Google Drive and OneDrive to AllDup. Scan the drive in the usual way, then review and remove detected duplicates. As the desktop program is synced with the online service, any copies of files will be deleted from both. ca

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from emails (and STOP SPAM)

There are plenty of ways to quickly remove yourself from mailing lists, but some are much better than others. **Nik Rawlinson** reveals what you have to do

It's sometimes said that you shouldn't click 'unsubscribe' links in emails, because it confirms to spammers that your inbox is active. Disreputable spammers can use this information to build lists of active addresses and sell them to criminals on the dark web.

However, there's nothing risky about unsubscribing from newsletters sent by legitimate firms. Under GDPR these companies have to follow strict privacy laws. They'll be fined heavily if they're caught ignoring your requests or mistreating your data.

Messages from mailing lists should always include unsubscribe links at the bottom of the message (known as the footer), but they don't all conform to the same standard. Some make the link difficult to find, or use small or light fonts to make it hard to spot.

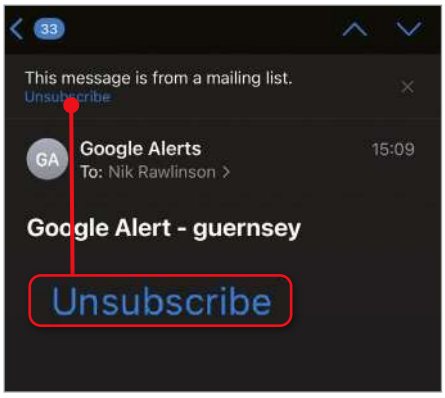
Thankfully, many email clients and services can recognise these links even if you can't – especially if they're also included in an email's header. When they spot one they can display a more prominent unsubscribe button at the top of the message window.

Unsubscribe in Gmail

First, hover your cursor over an email from a newsletter service. If Gmail recognises it's from a mailing list, you might see an Unsubscribe button appear (see screenshot below left). Click this, then the blue Unsubscribe button in the box that pops up.

If a button doesn't appear, you'll instead have to open the email and click the blue Unsubscribe option next to the sender's name (see screenshot below right). Google made this link more prominent late last year, replacing the old grey underlined text. Gmail will either unsubscribe you directly, or take you to a web page where you can do so.

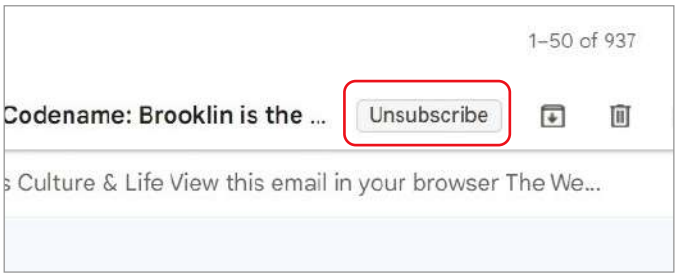
Google will add this option to Android phones over the next few months. If you don't see it yet, you'll have to use the old method of unsubscribing, which is tapping the three-dot icon at the top right and selecting Unsubscribe.



Apple Mail on iOS also has unsubscribe links

Unsubscribe in Apple Mail

With Apple and Google in close competition, it's no surprise that Apple Mail offers equivalent features to Gmail. Open a message sent from a mailing list and it will display a banner at the top of the screen containing an Unsubscribe link (see screenshot above). Click this and confirm that you want to opt out of future messages from that mailing list.



Hover your cursor over an email and look for an Unsubscribe button...

...or open the email and click the Unsubscribe option next to the sender's name

Forward emails to 'masked' addresses

You can avoid having to seek out all these Unsubscribe options by using an email-forwarding service to protect your real email address. We recommend Firefox Relay (https://relay.firefox.com), which lets you create '@mozmail.com' addresses that forward whatever they receive to your inbox. That way, senders will never be able to add your real email address to their lists.

You can create up to five 'masked' addresses with a free account. The 'Email protection' plan, which costs 99 cents (around 85p) a month, gives you an unlimited number of addresses, plus the option to reply to emails anonymously.

If you're having trouble unsubscribing from a list that's sending messages to one of your masked addresses, simply delete the address and the emails will stop arriving. Your regular email address will carry on working as before.

Unsubscribe in Outlook

There are so many different versions of Outlook and so many year editions (2010, 2013 etc) that it's tricky to provide universal advice on unsubscribing. Complicating things further, Microsoft doesn't add the same features to all PCs at the same time.

But nonetheless, you should first open an email in any version of Outlook and look for an Unsubscribe option at the top of the message – similar to those provided by Apple and Gmail. This usually appears next to 'Getting too much email?'. In our experience, though, Outlook is less effective at displaying this option.

If you pay for Microsoft 365, you can unsubscribe from newsletters by clicking the top-right Settings cog, then selecting Mail, followed by Subscriptions. Click 'Unsubscribe' next to the newsletters you no longer want.

Unsubscribe in Proton Mail

We like Swiss-based Proton Mail's (www.snipca.com/49105) focus on privacy, and it's no surprise that it has a built-in unsubscribe option like Apple's and Gmail's. When you're using the webmail version, it adds an 'Unsubscribe' button to the top of the message window (see screenshot below). Click this and it will either unsubscribe you directly or redirect you to the next step in the process. You'll find the same button in the Proton Mail mobile apps, where it appears between the header and body of the message.

Unsubscribe in Yahoo Mail

In the online version of Yahoo Mail, the option to unsubscribe appears to the right of the sender's address when you have the message displayed on your screen. If you're using the Yahoo Mail app, you'll need to open the relevant message, then tap the three dots on the toolbar at the foot of the screen, followed by Unsubscribe.

As all of these services rely on spotting unsubscribe links in the message or its header, you may find that some get missed. This isn't such a problem if the Unsubscribe option is on the screen, but putting it in a menu means you need to tap and see with Yahoo Mail. As a test, while it recognised emails from estate agent Rightmove as coming from a mailing list, it didn't treat OnTheMarket messages in the same way.

Use a third-party unsubscribe service

Not all email services come with an unsubscribe option, so you could try using a third-party service. Many of these charge a monthly or annual fee. As an example, Clean Email (www.clean.email) charges £11.99 a month for one email account. However, Cleanfox (www.cleanfox.io) will do the job for free, as long as you're happy with it gathering data "for statistical purposes on e-commerce". It says it doesn't "transmit any data for advertising purposes, targeting, database or profile enrichment".

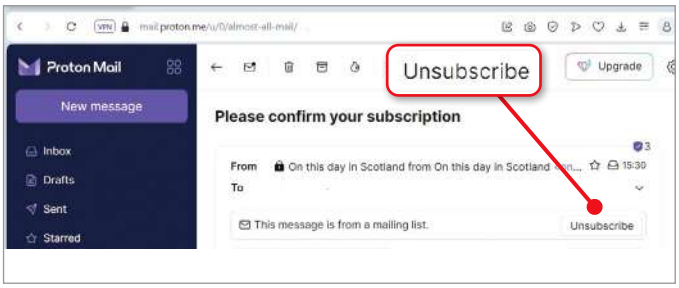
Cleanfox didn't spot any newsletters in our inbox

We gave Cleanfox access to a Gmail account in which there were mailing-list messages from estate agents OnTheMarket, Rightmove and Zoopla, software firm AppSumo and ad-blocking tool AdGuard. Each of these triggered the Unsubscribe link when we opened Gmail, but Cleanfox claimed there were no newsletters to unsubscribe from (see screenshot). Not very impressive, but Cleanfox has good reviews online, and you may have more luck than us.

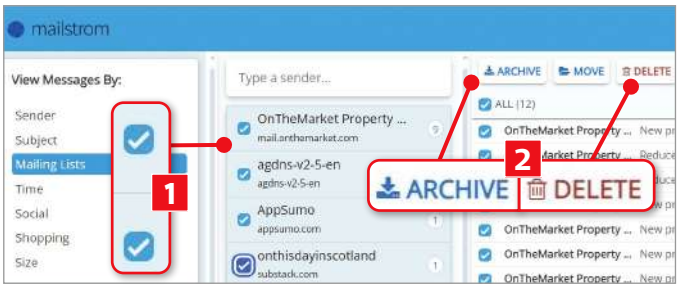
For a more manual approach, Mailstrom (https://mailstrom.co) has a dedicated Mailing Lists tab, which isolates these messages in your inbox so you can deal with them in one go.

Tick the box beside each of the senders whose messages you want to delete (1 in our screenshot below), and their messages will be shown in the mail pane so you can delete or archive them as a block 2. If you prefer to opt out from receiving any more – not just deleting messages you already have – instead click one sender at a time, then click the Unsubscribe button above the message list.

Bear in mind that Mailstrom's free trial is for one account, up to 5,000 emails, and can remove up to 25 per cent of messages it detects. This might be all you need for a one-off purge of newsletters. It certainly worked well for us. ca



Click this 'Unsubscribe' button in Proton Mail



Mailstrom lets you delete or archive multiple emails in one go

Take the ultimate PC health check

Learn more about the inner workings of your PC and spot hardware failures by performing a system audit with Glow. **Robert Irvine** reveals what to check using this brilliant free program

It's always useful to know what's going on inside your PC, but system-information software is often confusing (like CPU-Z), paid-for (like SIW) or outdated (like Speccy). Glow (www.snipca.com/49007) provides a simple, free and modern way to analyse your computer, and has just released its third and final version. It lets you check all your hardware and software is working correctly – letting you spot early signs of failure – and learn lots of useful information.

To download Glow, visit its Releases page (www.snipca.com/49138), click the 'Glow_v3.00_Final.zip' link and extract the contents of the ZIP file. Double-click the 'Glow_64.exe' file (if you're running 64bit Windows) or 'Glow_arm64.exe' (if you have an ARM processor) to run the program.

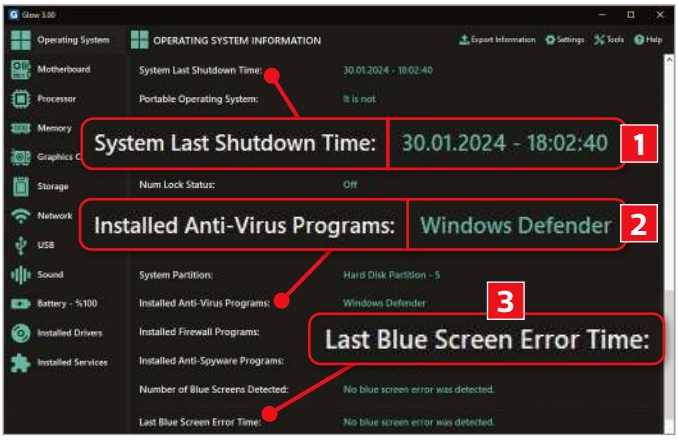
Because Windows regards it as an 'unrecognised app', Glow will trigger a security warning from Microsoft SmartScreen Defender, but it's completely safe to use, so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

Check your system specifications

Glow's Operating System tab, which serves as its home screen, provides a handy summary of your PC's specifications. These include the manufacturer and model; the version and build of Windows you're running; and the email address of your registered user account.

Glow also lists your device ID, which is the unique number for your computer, and your product ID, which is the number associated with your installation of Windows. This is different to the licence key you used to activate the operating system and is primarily used for technical support and troubleshooting.

Scroll down the Operating System tab and you'll find interesting information about when your PC was last shut down (1 in our screenshot below) and booted, including the 'uptime' for the current session. You can also check your antivirus 2 and firewall software are working, and see when your computer last suffered the dreaded Blue screen of death 3.



Learn useful information about your PC on Glow's Operating System tab

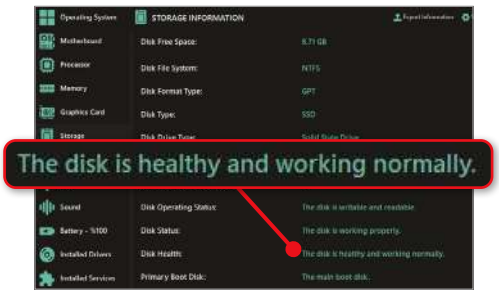
Glow tells you how much memory is currently available on your PC

Audit your PC's components

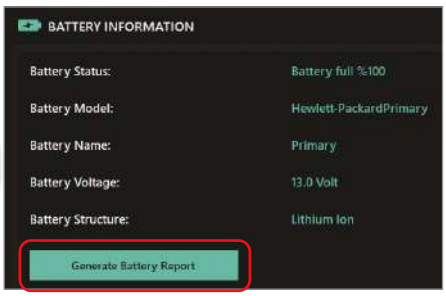
If you're thinking of upgrading your PC, Glow can help ensure you buy the right components. It provides comprehensive data about your motherboard, processor and memory, which you'd usually have to delve deep into Windows to find. You can learn the manufacturer and model of these components; check if TPM 2.0 is enabled (essential for installing Windows 11); and verify the speed and the number of cores of your CPU.

Particularly useful is the Memory tab, which reveals the total amount of RAM installed on your system, and how much is currently in use and free (see screenshot above) – the same details are provided for virtual memory. Glow even tells you the type of RAM, such as DDR4, and which slots the modules are inserted into.

It's also worth checking the Graphics Card tab to view the model of your GPU,



Check the health of your hard drive and SSD on Glow's Storage tab



Discover if your laptop's battery is losing power by generating a report

confirm that your graphics card is working smoothly and see when its driver was last updated – if this was some time ago, you should update it manually. The same tab tells you the screen resolution and refresh rate of your monitor.

Check the health of your hard drive

Glow's Storage tab is much more informative than the section of the same name in the Windows Settings app and tells you all you need to know about your hard drives. Discover the exact size of each drive; how much space is available on it; the number of partitions; the manufacturer, model and serial number; its file system – NTFS or FAT32 – and even its interface, such as SATA.

Best of all, Glow shows you at a glance whether the drive is working properly, able to read and write data, and deemed to be healthy (see screenshot above), meaning it's not slowing down or suffering from bad sectors (unusable blocks of storage). If you have more than one drive, such as a mechanical hard drive and an SSD, switch between them using the 'Disk name' dropdown menu to update Glow's information accordingly.

View information about your adapters

The next three tabs in Glow provide information about your network adapters, USB controllers and sound card. For example, on the Network tab you can switch between the different adapters installed on your PC to view their connection type (Ethernet or Wi-Fi), MAC address (the device's unique physical address) and IP address, which is used to identify the adapter's network connection. Glow also displays the local connection speed, though this appears to be an 'up to' figure for the adapter rather than a real-time measurement.

The USB tab is mainly useful for verifying that your USB devices are working smoothly, while the Sound tab does the same for audio devices and also tells you their manufacturers and hardware IDs.

Generate a laptop battery report

You can use Glow's Battery tab to gauge the current health of your laptop's battery. Click the Generate Battery Report button (see screenshot above) to create an HTML report, then click Yes to open it in your browser (the file is also saved to Glow's installation folder).

The report's 'Installed batteries' section tells you the design capacity of your laptop's battery, which is how much power it's capable of storing (in mWh – milliwatt hours), and its full-charge capacity, which is the amount of power it now holds when fully charged. If the second figure is much lower than the first, you may need to upgrade your laptop.

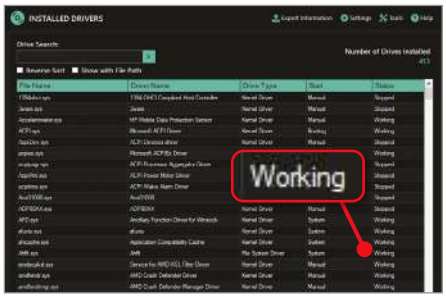
The report also reveals your laptop's cycle count – the number of times its full battery capacity has been drained. Most batteries last for at least 500 cycles.

Below this information, you'll find your usage history, which provides a week-by-week breakdown of how long your laptop ran on battery and mains power, and the effect this had on its battery capacity and life. This data can help you pinpoint when performance problems started.

Spot defective device drivers

To view a list of device drivers in Windows, you need to open Command Prompt, type driverquery then try to make sense of the result. Glow makes things much easier by providing an instant list of all your installed drivers when you click its tab of that name. This includes each driver's name, type and – unlike Command Prompt's list – whether it's currently working (see screenshot left) or has stopped. You can optionally show each driver's file path.

The Installed Services tab offers similar information for Windows background processes, allowing you to spot suspicious activity and re-enable legitimate services that have stopped. Glow doesn't let you change the active status of services or drivers, but it's very useful for reference. ca



Glow lists all your device drivers and tells you whether they're working

Boost your PC using Glow's advanced tools

Although Glow is mainly a system-information program, it also includes options for optimising your PC, which you'll find in the Tools menu in its top-right corner. Here's what you can do with those tools.

SFC & DISM Automation Tool
This tool detects and repairs corrupt system files using Windows' System File Checker and 'Deployment Image Servicing and Management' features (which are usually accessible via Command Prompt). Press Ctrl+Q to open the tool, then click Start Repair.

Cache Cleanup Tool
Free up space on your hard drive by deleting temporary and redundant files. Glow offers one-click Clean buttons for folders including Windows Applications Temporary Cache and Windows Update Download History. Press Ctrl+W to launch this tool.

TRIM Audit Tool
Speed up your SSD by enabling the TRIM command, which tells it which blocks of data can be safely erased. Glow lets you check if TRIM is enabled, and activate it if not. Press Ctrl+E to access these options.

System Software Tool
Update system software including graphics drivers and DirectX, by pressing Ctrl+R to launch this tool. It provides shortcuts to the relevant company websites so you can download what you need.

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PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Should I use M-Discs to preserve photos?

Q I keep my main photo archive in online storage, but I've been encouraged by my family to archive my whole library in a physical format for future generations. M-Disc technology has caught my eye, as it's supposedly 'indestructible'. Is it worth the expense of buying the discs and a Blu-ray disc burner? For peace of mind (and a quiet life), I need to find a lasting solution and this seems like a good option. Do you agree?

John Ashe

M-Discs may be a sturdy format to store photos on, but will the technology be around to read them in the future?

A Yes, to a degree, but with a few reservations. Millenniata, the company behind the M-Disc format claimed the discs can last up to 1,000 years. That's significantly longer than the firm itself, which went bust a few years ago. Regardless of this, some companies still manufacturer M-Disc media and, in principle, an M-Disc burned today should remain readable for many years – and possibly longer than less-durable alternatives. A variety of laboratory tests certainly suggest that M-Discs are sturdier than traditional DVDs and Blu-rays.

The trouble is, there's zero guarantee that future generations will be able to use M-Discs, or any other current optical disc format. Just as floppy disks were replaced by newer technologies, so too will today's popular physical-media formats – and we'd argue optical discs' days are numbered. Few new PCs now include DVD/Blu-ray drives as standard, and that decline will only accelerate.

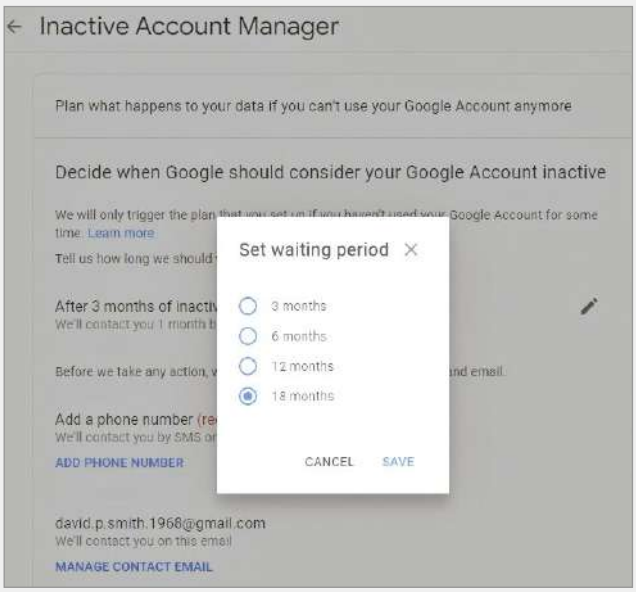
Fast-forward a generation or two and we'd imagine that reading an optical disc will be akin to trying to recover data from an 8in floppy disk. Technically impossible? No. But not something the average person in the street would want or be able to do.

With this in mind, entrusting your archive to online storage could actually be the better long-term bet – as long as you stick with a trusted provider.

Of course, even today's tech giants could eventually disappear, putting any online archive at risk. However, that's unlikely to happen overnight or without warning. But you must ensure that your dependents or descendants are able to access the digital keys to your account. This aspect is perhaps best addressed in your will. Make your executor aware of both your will and the archive's existence.

As a backup, perhaps use a tool like Google's Inactive Account Manager (see screenshot left) – this can send automated messages and share selected data with trusted contacts.

But if you're determined to leave an archive in 'physical' form, and don't want to print thousands of photos, you'd probably have to create a time capsule that contains everything needed to access the images. In other words, in addition to the M-Discs themselves, you'd also need to archive a computer with an optical drive and the software required to read the data. The whole shebang, in other words. It's up to you whether you consider that both practical and worthwhile.



Use Google's Inactive Account Manager to send automated messages and share selected data with trusted contacts

What's wrong with my Ring doorbell?

Q I fitted a Ring doorbell (pictured below right) a couple of years ago. Since then, I've had to remove it three or four times to charge it. That had always worked fine. On the most recent occasion, however, plugging it in initially just resulted in the circular light around the button flashing blue, pretty rapidly – and the doorbell itself didn't appear to be charging.

Previously, when I'd plugged it in, the blue ring has flashed but only partially, illuminating progressively to indicate charge level (culminating in a full ring when it's fully charged). Several times, I removed it from the socket and tried again, but the same thing happened. I then gave up.

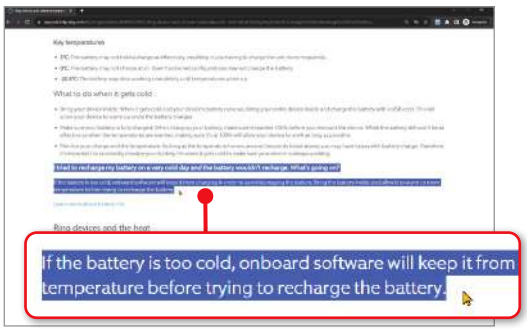
I tried again the next day and it was fine, and is now fully charged and working well. I found a page on the Ring website that explains a range of light patterns (www.snipca.com/48926), but not what I experienced. Do you have any idea what might've been the problem here?

Terry Mason

Ring doorbells have a light around the button that indicates their status

A Yes, there are a couple of possibilities – neither of which Ring outlines on the page you looked at. The first is that your doorbell's battery is spent – or on its way out – so it can no longer hold a charge. However, that can't be the case here, because you say it's now fully charged.

Instead – and given the time of year – it is almost certain that the battery was simply too cold to be charged. Lithium-ion batteries don't perform well in low temperatures, and your doorbell actually has built-in circuitry to stop it charging if the battery is too cold. Ring explains this at www.snipca.com/48927 – see screenshot above though doesn't detail the rapid flashing of the blue light that goes with it.



As Ring explains on its website, cold temperatures can affect their doorbells' lithium-ion batteries

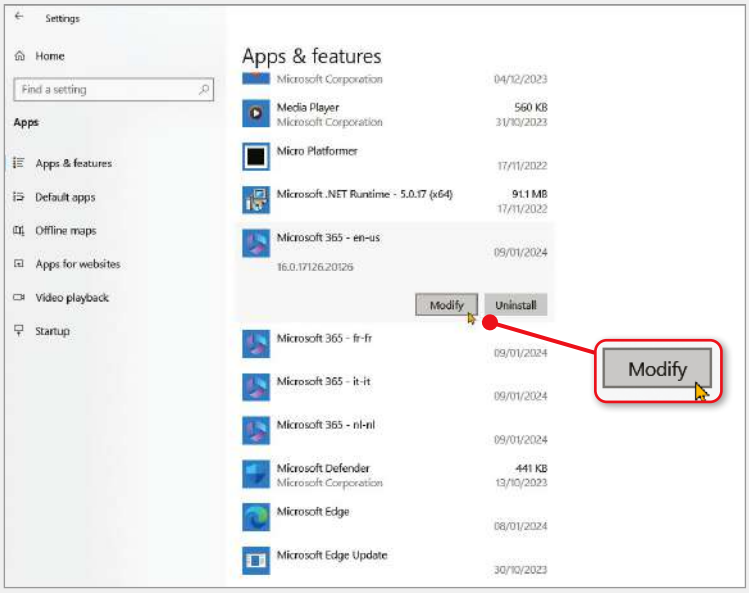
When the battery has warmed sufficiently, meaning to at least a few degrees Celsius above zero, it'll once more be able to receive a charge.

Incidentally, a lithium-ion battery that gets too hot may also malfunction. But with a Ring doorbell battery's tipping point for trouble being around 45°C, it's not something we have to worry about too much here in the UK.

Why won't Outlook open my Word documents?

Q Here's a strange problem. When I recently opened a Word document in Microsoft Outlook I couldn't read it directly and saw an error message saying that Windows 10 is not configured to run the program. If I click the Open option, Word appears, but with a similar warning. As a workaround, I can save the document to a folder and then it'll open fine. Do you have any idea what's going on here? Incidentally, I'm using Microsoft Office 365.

Colin Dixon



Fix a corrupted Microsoft 365 program by clicking Modify in Apps settings

A This typically points to some corruption with your Office installation – perhaps caused by a power cut.

The good news is that it's generally easy to fix, by making use of the repair tool that's part of Microsoft 365.

First, click the Start button followed by the Settings cog, and then Apps. Next, scroll through the displayed list of apps to find the Microsoft 365 entry. Click this followed by the Modify button (see screenshot). Now, choose the Quick Repair option, then click Repair.

This fixes most problems. If not, repeat these steps, but this time choose the Online Repair option instead, because this conducts a more thorough set of fixes – but it takes much longer to complete.

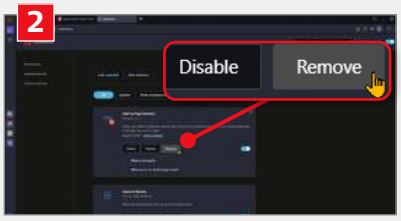
How do I stop Opera auto-refreshing?

Q I've been using the Opera browser for a long time, but a new problem has arisen. If I leave a page for a few minutes, when I come back the page will refresh itself. This is a nuisance but I am unable to find out how to turn this feature off.

Chris Ellison

A This isn't a feature of Opera, so something else must be causing it – almost certainly an extension. Do you recall installing any recently? If not, it's possible that some other program you've installed has sneaked an extension into your browser without you realising (such things are often intentionally designed to go unnoticed).

For example, the IObit Surfing Protection extension causes precisely this behaviour, as it analyses each website you visit. It considers a return to your screen after some time away as a new visit to the displayed site. This specific behaviour can't be disabled but the extension itself (or another like it) can. First, click the Extensions button (the cube, top right – see screenshot 1) followed by 'Manage extensions'. Then, next to the offending extension, just click Disable or Remove 2, as you see fit.

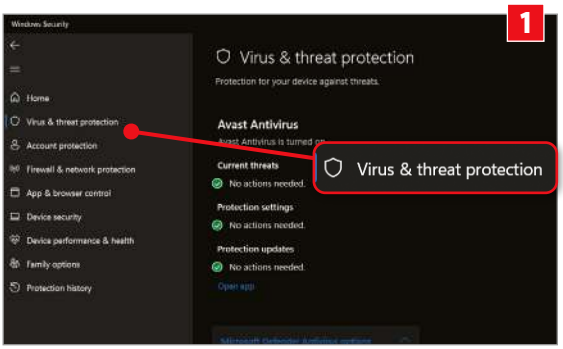


To remove a problematic extension in Opera, click the Extensions button (1) followed by Disable or Remove (2)

Do I need two antivirus tools?

Q Back in Issue 672's 'Best Free Downloads for 2024' Cover Feature, you commented that you expect Malwarebytes to be updated this year (page 51). However, I'm perfectly happy with my current antivirus, which is Windows Defender as part of Windows 10. I have read elsewhere, in many articles, that it's not a good idea to run two antivirus programs side by side. Would it not, then, be a bad idea to run Defender and Malwarebytes at the same time?

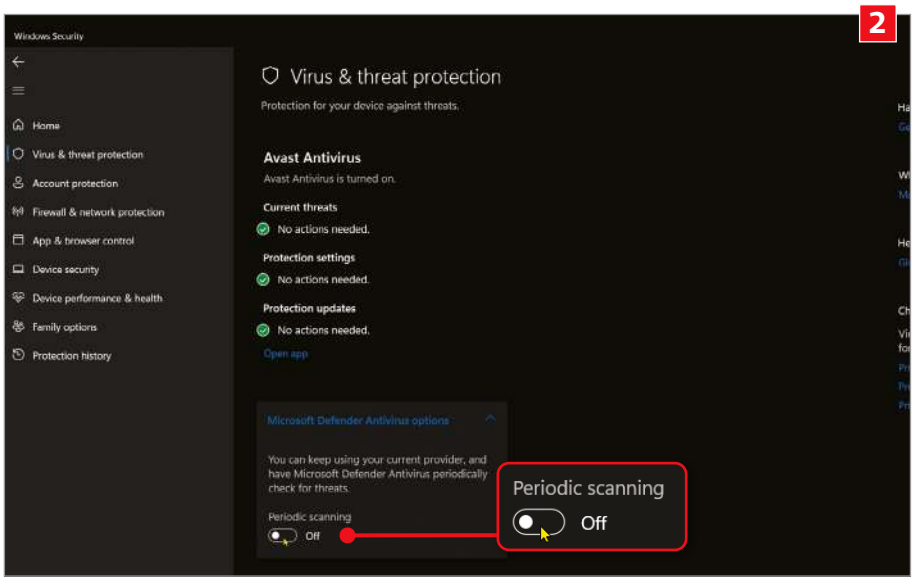
Marek Wesolowski



A There's certainly some truth in the idea that running more than one antivirus tool is unwise. Running multiple security programs can slow down a computer and could lead to conflicts. However, specifically in regard to Microsoft Defender (as it's now formally known), this shouldn't be a problem – because Defender will disable itself when third-party antivirus software is installed. Well, most of the time.

Even if you have another security program installed, Defender will still run occasionally. It's unnecessary and can slow things down.

To disable it, first click Start followed by the Settings cog, and then 'Update & security' followed by 'Virus & threat protection' (see screenshot 1). Finally, under 'Microsoft Defender Antivirus options' click to switch off the 'Periodic scanning' option 2.



To stop Microsoft Defender slowing your computer, open Settings, then click 'Virus & threat protection' (1), and turn off 'Periodic scanning' (2)

Q: Why is my Ethernet slower than my Wi-Fi?

A: Issue 669, page 65 – find it on our 2023 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/48860

Will my Android phone connect to Apple AirPods?

Q I have hearing difficulties, but I find it hard to wear a conventional hearing aid without it falling off. I know people who use Bluetooth earbuds, and they tell me that they are less likely to fall out – even when doing manual work. I'd like to use earbuds with my Samsung Galaxy A40 Android mobile phone. It seems to come down to whether my phone can act as a listening device that can communicate with air buds. I would be grateful for your advice.

Keith Griffiths

A You first used the term 'earbuds' and subsequently the phrase 'air buds'. If you're wondering whether your A40 phone is compatible with Bluetooth earbuds generally, then the answer is yes. On your phone you first need to tap Settings followed by Connections, followed by Bluetooth. Next, tap the switch to On, power up your earbuds and set them to pairing mode, and then just tap their name on your phone's screen.

But your mention of 'air buds' makes us wonder if you actually and specifically meant AirPods, which is the brand Apple uses for its earbuds. If so, the answer is still yes. This is because, while AirPods are designed for and work best with Apple smartphones and tablets, they can also be used as standard Bluetooth earbuds.

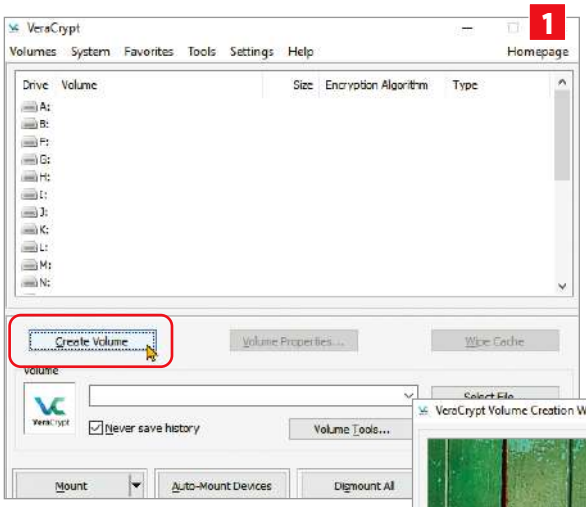
The instructions for your A40 phone are the same as above. To put the AirPods into Bluetooth-pairing mode, find the setup button on the back of the charging case (pictured above) then press and hold it for a few seconds.

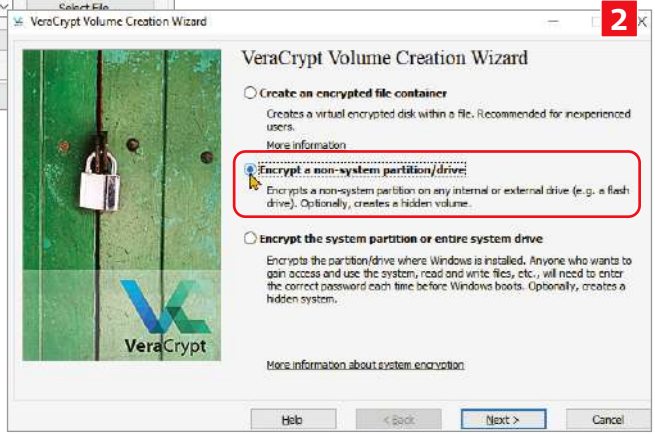
To pair your AirPods with your phone press and hold this button on the charging case

How can I encrypt my SD card?

Q I followed the excellent advice of Carl Hughes, in Issue 671's Readers' Tips section, by buying a 64GB SanDisk SD card, instead of a USB Stick, and I've found it's ideal for my needs. However, I wonder if it's possible to secure it with a password or PIN code? I can't see anything obvious to try. Many thanks for a consistently great magazine, incidentally.

Frank McFadyen





Encrypt a drive or partition in Windows Home editions by installing VeraCrypt

A Encrypting any drive is a relatively straightforward process, no matter which form it takes. If you use a Pro, Education or Enterprise edition of Windows 10 or 11 then the built-in BitLocker tool can do the job.

In File Explorer, right-click the drive, choose 'Turn on BitLocker' and then simply follow the prompts to apply a passcode of your choice.

This option is unavailable in the Home editions of Windows, but it's possible to achieve much the same result using third-party software, such as VeraCrypt – a free download from www.veracrypt.fr.

With this you can create either encrypted 'container' files or entire drives/partitions. A container file doesn't have to occupy the entire space but, when 'mounted', it will appear to Windows as a drive with its own drive letter. Without the password, it will appear as one large, encrypted file.

You'll find the full tutorial at www.snipca.com/48928. However, as a quick-start version, to encrypt the whole SD card, launch VeraCrypt, then click Create Volume (see screenshot 1), choose the 'Encrypt a non-system partition/drive' option 2, then click Next. Now just follow the onscreen instructions.

Is it safe to use Gmail on my work laptop?

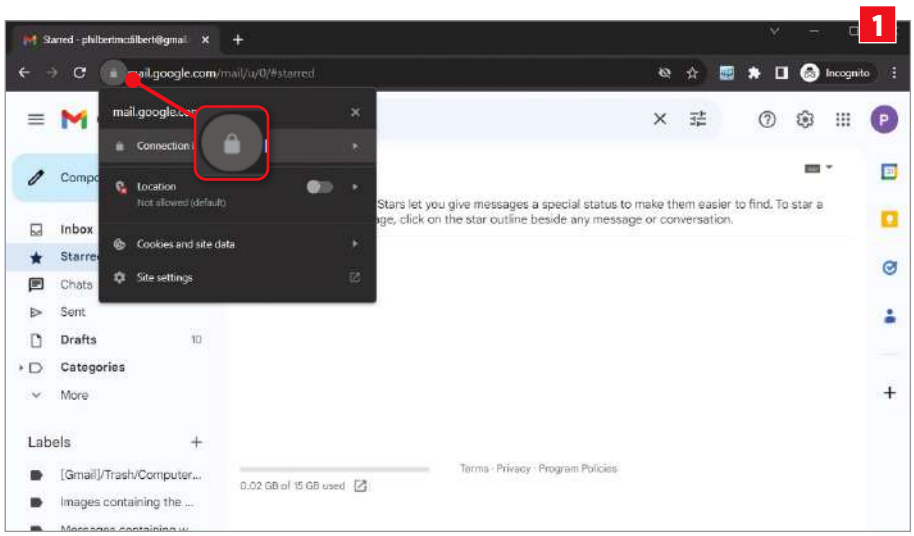
Q My new job comes with a work laptop, which the company says is fine to use outside office hours for limited personal stuff. As I don't have my own laptop, this will be useful. However, I wonder if it would be sensible or safe to access my personal Gmail on this business system?

Would my employer be able to read my messages?

Tony Ford

A Logging into Gmail from any machine creates a secure, encrypted connection between Google's servers and the web browser. This is signified by the padlock icon in the address bar. You can click this (see screenshot 1), then click 'Connection is secure' 2 for more information and confirmation of this. In this regard, your employer would not be able to directly 'see' what you're doing in Gmail.

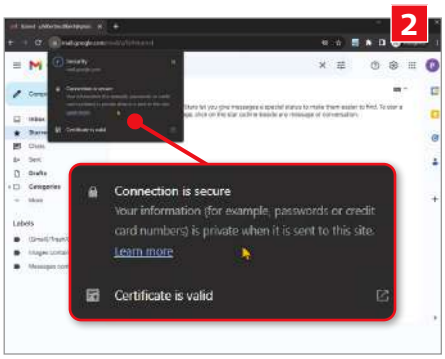
However, if you're connected to the company's network, either directly or via a VPN, then in theory at least an administrator could create a 'man-in-the-middle' setup that spoofs Google's digital certificates, while in the background logging into Gmail using the credentials you supplied. You would be oblivious to this happening.



In your browser click the padlock icon to the left of your address bar...

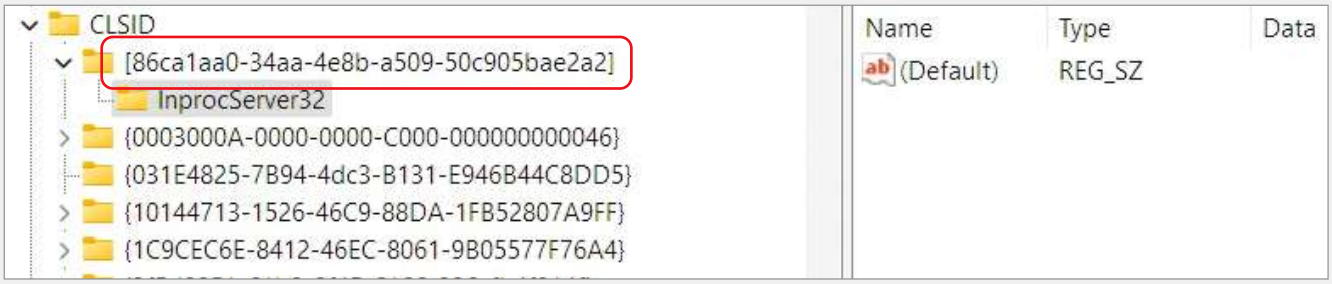
This isn't likely. Easier, would be admin-level installation of keylogging software that records everything you type, which would work regardless of any encrypted connection. This is more common and – again – you'd probably be unaware of it.

Your employer has been clear that you can use the device for some personal use, so it's up to you if you trust that it's not watching you – but we'd generally be wary of using company equipment for personal activities.



...then click 'Connection is secure' to confirm no one is snooping on your Gmail emails

Why won't your context-menu tip work for me?



When creating the registry key to restore your full context menu, remember to use curly brackets, not square ones

Q Going back through Issue 663, on page 52 Robert Irvine shows how to return the full context menu when right-clicking in Windows 11. Well, this doesn't work. I have been over it several times and I cannot see what is wrong. Any advice please? I include a screenshot of the entry I created in my registry.

Clive Bonner

A Yes, you included a screenshot of your registry that showed the problem – but it's not easy to see unless you know what you're looking for. However, when creating the {86ca1aa0-34aa-4e8b-a509-50c905bae2a2} key (see screenshot), you used square brackets instead of curly brackets. We did include a link to the correct full string on our Pastebin account (at www.snipca.com/46783), but we assume you typed it manually.

Either way, the fix for you from here is easy: just right-click this key and choose Rename, or press F2, and then replace the square brackets with their curly equivalents. To do this, you'll almost certainly need to press and holding the Shift key when tapping the [or] key on your keyboard.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

LCD, LED and OLED screens?

Q It's been a long time since I bought a new monitor, and I find myself overwhelmed by the various technologies. My biggest confusion is over the different types of display. I've looked at screens described as LCD, LED, mini-LED and OLED. I really have no idea what the differences are between any of them. Can you advise?

Barry Cunningham

A There's a huge number of differentiating factors, but the fundamental distinction comes down to the way the displays are illuminated.

Liquid-crystal display (or LCD) technology is nothing new. If you've owned a calculator any time since the 1970s it almost certainly had an LCD screen. But LCD visibility depends heavily on the light source. It's pretty easy to angle a pocket calculator toward some light, with the reflective backing creating the contrast needed to see what's displayed.

But that's not practical with desktop screens, so LCD monitors require a built-in light source. Those marketed as 'LCD' generally employ one or more cold-cathode fluorescent lamps (CCFLs) – a bit like those long tubes that were once a common feature in kitchens. They're reasonably reliable, and fairly cheap to manufacture.

But modern light-emitting diodes (or LEDs) produce more light, more efficiently. They're a bit more expensive to produce, but cheaper to run (though with a computer monitor, savings on electricity over a year will be small). They tend to be more reliable than CCFLs so many displays marketed as 'LED' are just LCD panels with LED backlighting.

Mini-LEDs are pretty much what you might guess – smaller LEDs. Again, screens marketed as 'mini-LED' are typically just LCD panels. However, the smaller lamps allow for handy features, such as 'localised dimming', which in turn can improve displayed images. For example, mini-LEDs might be dimmed in darker areas to increase contrast – something that's just not practical with CCFLs or traditional LED light sources.

Finally, OLED – or organic LED – panels (like the pictured Samsung model) are in a class of their own. Each pixel creates its own light source. These are expensive to make but produce superb images with effectively 'infinite' contrast, because when an OLED pixel is off, it produces no light.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Do I need a new licence to upgrade to Windows 11?

Q In 2010, I purchased a Windows 7 Professional installation disc. Later, I used Microsoft's free upgrade to get Windows 10. Now I want to upgrade my motherboard and processor and move to Windows 11. Would I have to remove my current licence then use it on my new setup? Would this work or would I have to pay Microsoft for whatever Windows 11 costs?

Incidentally, I stick interesting *Computeractive* articles in a scrapbook, and shred the rest of the magazine for use as bedding for my gerbils (as pictured). I wonder what uses other readers have for their old copies of *Computeractive*?

David Jackson

Credit Matt Bero Unsplash

Computer inactive: old copies of your favourite magazine can make great beds for gerbils

A Microsoft's licencing rules are complex, and we therefore can't always be certain in our answers to questions relating to such matters. But, from your description, we're pretty confident you'd be fine – because retail licences are the most flexible of the lot. Your Windows 7 licence was subsumed into a Windows 10 licence when you upgraded, and the same will be true again when you switch to Windows 11.

While you can't use one licence on two machines at once, and non-retail original equipment manufacturer (OEM) licences are tied to the original machine, there's nothing to stop a retail licence being used on a new machine – or a machine made of primarily new parts.

You might be asked to re-activate after installation, but that should be a formality.

And we're glad to hear that *Computeractive* is providing cosiness for your cuddly rodents. So come on fellow readers – what useful purposes have you found for your old issues?

Next Issue

ON SALE **Weds** 28 Feb

- Can we change Google Maps?
- Can I transfer Windows 10 to a new PC?
- Why is my PC beeping?

...And many more

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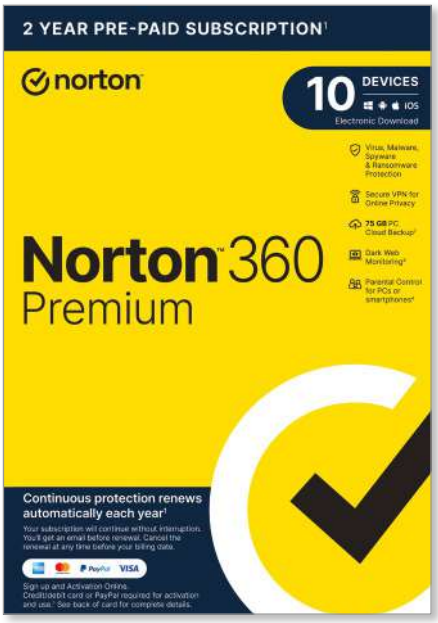

Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

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Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

Why can't I digitise my old cassettes?

Q **In Issue 673's How To section (page 35), you explained how to digitise old cassettes, but I'm stuck on a compatibility problem between my cassette player and my PC. The USB connection from the cassette player is showing when I select the Audacity Audio Setup input source, but when I click Record then press Play on the cassette player, an error message comes up.**

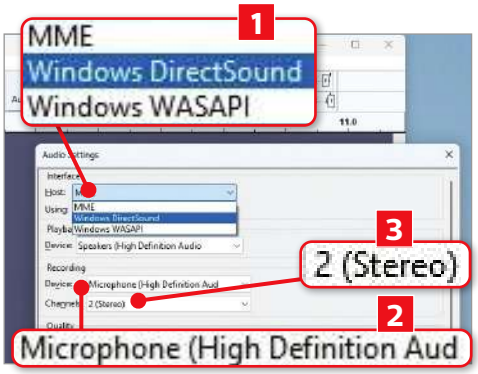
Roger Hewitt

A The Audacity error code you're receiving (-9996 Invalid device) refers to an invalid audio device, but it's tricky to diagnose without knowing exactly which equipment you're using.

You mention a USB connection, which could mean your problem stems from a driver-related issue. Have you tried using the 3.5mm audio jack connection from your tape player that we recommended in the How To feature? Audacity recommends checking for loose connections and establishing whether the audio device you're connecting to is working properly.

This error can also occur when there's a conflict with Windows Audio Session API (WASAPI), which is your computer's main interface for audio playback. To fix this, try using a different USB cable or port on your PC. If that doesn't work, you could try changing your audio settings. Click the Audio Setup button on the Audacity toolbar, then under 'Host' experiment by switching between the MME, Windows DirectSound and Windows WASAPI options (1 in our screenshot above right). See if this cures your problem.

While you're there, double-check that the correct device has been selected under Recording 2. It's also worth changing the Channels setting – switching between 2 (Stereo) 3 and 1 (Mono) – as Audacity claims this can sometimes produce errors with certain sound devices.



Switch host if you're seeing the -9996 error code when trying to record with Audacity

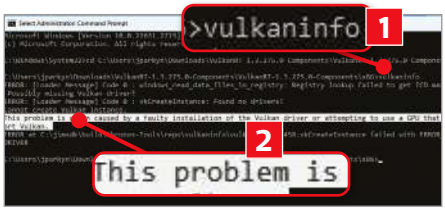
Do I need Vulkan to use Upscayl?

Q **I was keen to try Upscayl (www.upscayl.org) to enhance some old photos, but it wouldn't work. I read somewhere that your computer needs a graphics card that supports Vulkan. I don't know what that is, let alone whether my PC supports it.**

Ian Hollands

A A Vulkan-compatible GPU is indeed required to use Upscayl. Apologies for not pointing this out. Most PC graphics cards support Vulkan, which is a standard for processing high-quality images. To check, visit Vulkan's site at www.snipca.com/49082, then click the 'Latest Runtime/Zip' link, followed by Download Latest Binary Zip.

Next, extract the ZIP file to your Downloads folder, then navigate to the folder that contains the vulkaninfo tool (usually **Downloads\VulkanRT-1.3.275.0-Components\VulkanRT-1.3.275.0-Components\x86**). Right-click the directory address at the top of the File Manager window and select Copy Address.



Discover whether your PC supports Vulkan by running vulkaninfo and looking for this error

Next click Start, type cmd, right-click the Command Prompt icon and select 'Run as administrator'. Now type cd followed by a space, then press Ctrl+V to paste the directory address you copied, and press Enter. Finally, type vulkaninfo (1 in our screenshot below left) and press Enter. If you see an error saying 'This problem is often caused by attempting to use a GPU that does not support Vulkan' 2, then your PC isn't compatible. For alternatives that don't need Vulkan, try ImageEnlarger.com (www.snipca.com/44863) and Upscale.media (www.upscale.media).

How can you download Microsoft PC Manager?

Q **In Issue 674's 'Your Top 20 Programs Revealed' Cover Feature, you mention Microsoft PC Manager at number six. I clicked the link you gave (www.snipca.com/44240), but the download button is greyed out, and the page says the program is 'coming soon'. How did so many readers manage to download the software from that page?**

Colin Froude

A At the time, the beta version of Microsoft PC Manager was still available to download from that link. Thousands of readers had installed it from there. But Microsoft has now taken it down – temporarily, at least. The greyed out 'coming soon' button makes us think that Microsoft is planning to launch the final version soon. If not, you can still download the beta version from Major Geeks (www.snipca.com/49079) – click Download Now (see screenshot below).

You can still download the beta version of Microsoft PC Manager from Major Geeks

Jargon Buster

1080p (HD) High-definition video of 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K (UltraHD) Video resolution of 3840x2160 pixels.

720p A common resolution of high-definition video: 1280x720 pixels.

7z Also known as 7-Zip. A free, open-source file archiver.

Administrator Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

AI Artificial intelligence. Intelligence demonstrated by a machine rather than a human being.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays.

APK Android Package Kit. The file format Android uses to install apps.

ARM Advanced RISC Machine. Processors that are more energy-efficient and are used in more devices than those made by AMD and Intel.

Barebones PC A computer kit that includes only the essential components, such as a case, power supply and motherboard. They usually lack a processor, RAM, hard drive and graphics card.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

Bitrate A measure of data transfer speed, or of the quality of digital video or audio files.

Blue screen of death This is shown when your PC crashes.

BMP Bitmap. A type of image file.

CD-ROM A CD containing data that can be read by a computer but not overwritten or erased.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users.

Checksum The result of a mathematical calculation made using a file. The checksum can be used to verify that a file's contents have not been tampered with.

Chiclet Small, flat, square keys on a keyboard with rounded corners.

Clickbait Online articles that use deliberately sensational or misleading headlines to tempt people to click through to them.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

CSV Comma Separated Value. A standard file format, used for storing information in tables in spreadsheet programs.

Dark web Websites that can only be accessed using special software such as the Tor browser.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DDR4 The newest, fastest type of computer memory.

DirectX A Microsoft technology required to run games in Windows.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Dolby Vision Dolby's HDR (High Dynamic Range) screen technology.

dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality, or the size an object will be shown on screen.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

FAT32 An old system used for formatting hard drives.

File extension The part of a file name after the full stop.

File path Shows the location of a file within Windows.

Fingerprinting A tracking method used by websites to identify you from the device and software you're using.

Firmware Basic software stored on hardware to control its operation.

FTP File Transfer Protocol. A system for transferring files between computers.

GDPR General Data Protection Regulation. 2018 EU law strengthening people's privacy.

Gesture Finger movements on a screen that perform an action.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

GPU Graphics Processor Unit. A chip designed to create 3D graphics.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HD High-definition. An increase in resolution over standard definition.

HDMI High-definition media interface. Connection that transmits high-def video and audio signals.

HDR10+ High-dynamic range 10. Current industry standard for TVs.

HLG A new high-definition TV format jointly developed by the BBC and Japanese broadcaster NHK.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

HTTPS Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure. The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IMEI Integrated Mobile Equipment Identity. A unique number used to identify each mobile phone.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that don't.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

Keylogging Recording everything someone types. Normally used to steal passwords.

LCD Liquid-crystal display. The technology used to create almost all flatscreen monitors.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Lightning connector Apple's own connector that connects iPhones and iPads to computers, monitors, cameras and chargers.

M-Disc A disc for storing media that its creators claim can last for a thousand years.

Manifest V3 Third version of the software that runs Chrome browser extensions. Google claims it will improve your security and privacy by restricting more strictly what extensions can do.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared with other PCs.

NTFS New Technology File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

.NET Microsoft's tool for building software.

OCR Optical character recognition. The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in PC and TV screens.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes without discarding any data.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. Used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

RAR Roshal Archive. A format for storing compressed files.

RAW A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it, without compression or optimisation.

Read To access data saved on a computer.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer so that it can be resold and reused.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives to a PC.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

Sound card An expansion card that lets a PC create audio.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

System restore point The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date and time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

TIFF Tagged Image File Format. A standard file format used to store graphics images.

Timestamp The time which an event is recorded by a computer.

Tooltip A small message that appears when the cursor hovers over an option.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A computer chip that allows your hardware to perform security-related tasks.

Upscale Automatically expanding the size of an image or video file.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible.

VA Vertical Alignment. A form of LCDs in which the liquid crystals naturally align vertically between the panes of glass.

Virtual memory Data that is temporarily moved from RAM to hard drive to make up for shortages in memory.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Write Save data to a hard drive.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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Fed up with ads cluttering the apps on his big screen, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Block adverts on a smart TV

Before you get too excited by the title of this column, no I haven't discovered an ingenious free means of skipping the commercials on ITVX, Channel 4 and the cheaper tiers of Netflix and Prime Video. If I had, I'd expect to be recognised in the King's Birthday Honours list, such is the abundance of annoying adverts on our TV screens these days.

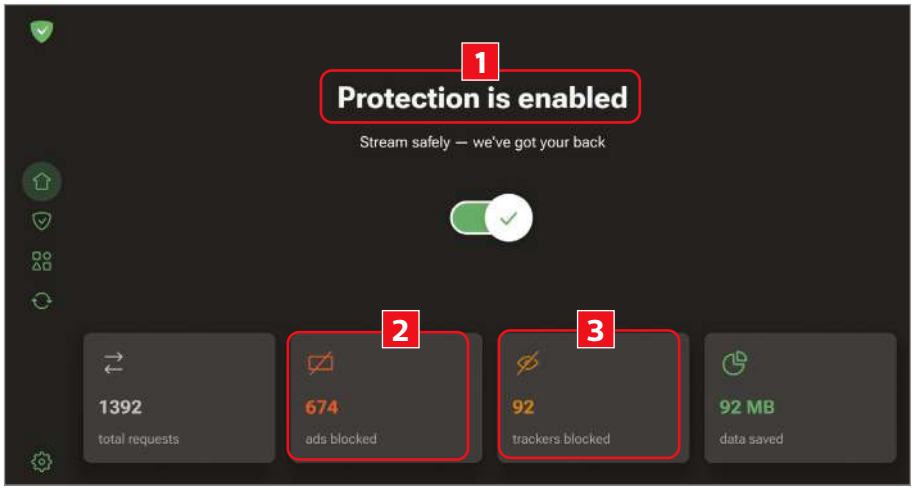
> After ruining the web, obstructive ads have spread to TV apps

I have, however, found a way to avoid other types of ads on my smart TV, such as pop-ups, banners and targeted promotions based on things I've looked at recently. After ruining the web with their obstructive and intrusive behaviour, these ads have spread to smart TV home screens and apps, where traditional ad blockers can't catch them.

So I was excited to read that ad-blocking specialist AdGuard now offers a version for Android/Google TV (www.snipca.com/49026), which should also work on Android-powered Fire TV sticks.

This claims to block "banners, popups and home screen ads", and to protect your personal data from apps that spy on you, though AdGuard stresses that it doesn't work on YouTube.

There were only two obstacles to me ridding my TV of ads: the app isn't available from official app stores, and it requires an AdGuard licence, which costs from £1.99 a month. But armed with instructions from the AdGuard website and the offer of a seven-day free trial, I decided to give it a go.



Within minutes of activation, AdGuard had blocked hundreds of ads on Robert's smart TV

To get the app on to my TV, I first needed to enable 'Developer options', so I could install apps from 'unknown sources'. I opened Settings, chose System then About and scrolled down to 'Android TV OS build'. I then selected this option until the message 'You are now a developer!' appeared.

Next, I installed 'Downloader by AFTVNews' from my TV's version of the Google Play store (www.snipca.com/49027) – it's also available for Fire TV (www.snipca.com/49028). I opened this app and – as instructed by AdGuard – typed agrd.io/tvapk and pressed Enter. This downloaded the APK file for 'AdGuard for Android TV', and after choosing Install, then Open I was greeted by the AdGuard setup screen.

I accepted the company's privacy policy and selected 'Log in or sign up' to start my free trial. I then scanned the on-screen QR code with my phone, to register for an account via my mobile browser. This activated my trial, without asking for my payment-card details, and showed a picture of a Viking warrior – AdGuard/Asgard, get it?

AdGuard's home screen told me that 'Protection is disabled' so I remedied this by switching it on. It then asked to set up a VPN connection to allow it to monitor network traffic. As this sounded important, I chose OK, and the app confirmed that protection was now enabled (1 in our screenshot).

The Protection settings for 'Ad blocking' were all switched on by default, but for good measure I also turned on 'Tracking protection'. It was now time to see if AdGuard lived up to its promises.

There were now no adverts on my Google TV's home screen, nor in any of the apps I opened, making them much cleaner and less irritating to browse. The only problem I had was with Now TV, which refused to load while protection was enabled. I was later able to fix this by excluding the app in AdGuard's settings.

On returning to AdGuard's home screen, I was shocked to see that in the few minutes since activation, it had already blocked 674 adverts 2 and 92 trackers 3, though it didn't reveal which apps were the culprits.

While I was impressed with AdGuard, I don't think I'll pay for a subscription once my free trial ends. Paying £24 (plus VAT) a year is quite a lot when you still have to suffer the interminable ads *between* shows.

Need help with blocking adverts on your smart TV apps? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to hack his own voicemail

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